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GOOD RIDDANCE

by

L. A. G. Strong

THE late October sun hovered near his setting over the peaks of the farthest island. Low and unsteady in the clear, rain-washed sky, he filled the west with saffron glory, making the sea almost too bright to look upon. The pine trees on the clump beside the water stood drenched in light: every needle was jewelled with drops from the brief shower that had passed inland across the shoulder of the mountain. The edge of the level field dazzled against the sea.

Suddenly the calm of the evening was broken by a series of wild cat-calls. A line of cows, sedate and leisurely, came out from the shadow of the clump and passed across the field. They walked on the edge of the field, outlined in gold, like creatures of a legend; and presently halted, looking about them, and swishing their tails. Then a last cow emerged at a run, pursued by a boy. He ran beside her, slapped her on the flank, paused, stood still, and uttered once again his demented, happy outcry. The cows paid no heed to it, but, being joined by their dilatory sister, they began to move slowly off again towards the farm. The boy stood for a few moments, staring at the unsteady sun. Then, with another yell, he turned a cartwheel, and followed the cows.

The way turned inland. The boy's shadow streamed away from him across the lurid grass to the swaying, glorious rumps of the cows. Ahead, over the huddled farm buildings, the mountains crowded, alert and wild. They seemed very close, as if they might spring down and crush the levels between them and the sea. As if to defy them, the boy turned another cartwheel. The grass was cool and wet under his hands. He turned a third, and a fourth: but the next, pitching on uneven ground, he missed, and rolled over with a shout upon his back. There, for sheer love of life, he lay, rolling his head from side to

side, laughing, and staring up into the immense distance of the sky.

As he stared into it, something happened, delicate, instantaneous, precise. The sun dipped behind the tall peak of the island, and a chill shadow shot across the sky: definite as the beam of a searchlight, yet so barely visible he could scarce believe he had seen it. The phenomenon sobered the boy for an instant: then, translating it with all else to his mood, he rose, shook himself, emitted a blood-curdling yell, and ran after the cows. He always sought to cover his dawdlings by arriving in a hurry. John Sutherland had a way of popping out like a jack-in-the-box from behind some outhouse, and shouting at him. He was not really afraid of John Sutherland. He was not afraid of anybody: but it was worth taking that much trouble not to annoy an employer who had so many ways of getting back on him.

A flock of gulls was sitting, sober and sleepy, in the field at the back of the farm. They looked at first sight like white rubbish thrown out by some orderly person. The boy whooped at them. They did not stir. Then a sound came which sent a single tremor across them like a wave. They rose together, and flew off in a cloud. The sound came again. It was the report of a gun, and the boy, hearing it, let all his limbs go slack, and ceased to hurry. John Sutherland was away in the sandhills, shooting rabbits.

The hoofs of the first cow clicked on the cobbles. Slowly and without deviating she made her way across to the milking shed. The others followed. It was already dusk around the farm, though the tops of the farthest mountains were still splashed with light. A flutter of pale colour appeared at the farm door, and followed the cows. Mrs. Sutherland was going in to the milking, where, in a minute, he must join her. Lest that minute be lost, he looked around everywhere, like a young animal. There was a busy, fussy noise coming round the wall of the dairy. The boy ran forward on tiptoe, and peered round. Old Joey M'Quaid was sitting in the middle of the yard, splitting up a packing case. With his frill of white beard, and his round face pale in the gloom, he worked with immense concentration. The boy gave a soundless chuckle. Stooping, he picked up a bit of grass that grew between the cobble stones. The little sod hanging from it made it a good missile. Accurately, he flung it at Joey, and ran towards

the milking shed, turning a final cartwheel, and emitting a wild yodel of defiance for old Joey.

Joey, when the turf struck him, looked up, and grinned. Seen in the dusk, it looked an amiable grin: but it was a grin of fury. A peculiarity of Joey's face, something in the set of his white moustache and beard, and his almost toothless mouth, made most of his expressions seem amiable—till you looked close. He knew where the turf came from, without the yell, and the shrill voice of Mrs. Sutherland that came to him over the roof.

"Derek! Go and wash those hands at once, you dirty boy. Putting them down on the filthy cobbles, and then coming in to milk! I'm ashamed of you, that I am."

"O—he-he-he," grinned old Joey to himself. Well. He would get his revenge, one day. It was a nice, long score he owed the boy. A nice, long score. With infinite relish, wrinkling up his putty-like nose, Joey shook his little chopper in the direction of the voices and the splashing pump: then desisted quickly, and muttered to himself, as the girl Norah passed across the yard to the milking.

"A fine evening, Mr. M'Quaid," she said, in her low, musical voice, giving the old man a mischievous side glance of amusement.

"Oh aye, oh aye, oh aye," he smiled and gibbered: and she went her way with a little grimace. She was short and small, a goodlooking, dark-haired girl, with bright grey eyes, come up from the south to keep her granny company. Her granny lived a mile away, in a little cottage under the headland. The girl had been only six months or so working for the Sutherlands. She came after breakfast, and went home in the evenings. She was nice to everyone, even to old Joey. People wondered why she had come, but the reason she always gave seemed, indeed, the only one.

Joey muttered to himself as soon as she was out of sight. He hated to be disturbed in his private thoughts and meditations. Like most lonely men, he talked to himself and gesticulated a great deal when he thought nobody was by. It was always a question in the neighbourhood whether Joey was or was not in his right wits. For many years he had lived in the little cabin on the hill with his mad sister. He had lost his leg a long time ago, when the railway was

being built, and until necessity forced him to work for the Sutherlands, he had led a life of leisure, making his sister do all that was needed. This, since the neighbours were compassionate, was not much. Every other day would be seen a strange procession of two, the mad woman scrambling over the headland, a sack on her back, and the one-legged man pursuing. She would often turn aside from her path, or squat upon a rock; but he would soon be up to her and drive her on her way with shouts and blows. When they had been an hour on the beach, and the sack was filled with winkles, or cockles, or limpets, or mussels, the procession would return. The poor mad woman would often be bent double beneath her burden, and it was no uncommon thing for her to arrive at the cabin on all fours. Two or three times on the journey back she would lie down and refuse to go on; and Joey, grinning with rage, would unstrap his wooden leg and beat her till she did. Strange though it may seem, his treatment of her never alienated the neighbours, for they had little sense of kindness towards a person not right in the head—unless that person had some childish or endearing human characteristic. Poor Ellen M'Quaid had none. Her face was unpleasant to look on, she had no articulate speech, and when the moon was full she used to go up on the hill and howl at it like a dog.

But Ellen died; and Joey was fain to shift for himself. It was characteristic of him that he made no fuss but came, docile as a lamb, to do odd jobs for John Sutherland. He liked John Sutherland, and a few months in his employ strengthened the liking to an animal devotion.

The boy he had regarded almost from the first as a natural enemy. Derek—the outlandish name was in itself a proof no good could come of him—was a Glasgow waif, farmed out in the usual manner to a home where he might work and be reasonably cared for. Joey did not like boys anyhow; they played tricks on him, and called after him in the road. He had therefore looked with suspicion upon the new arrival, and his suspicions were soon justified. Derek was not only no better, he was worse, than the other boys Joey had known. He was very clever, and Joey had been some time in realising the source of the many small annoyances that soon beset his days. The bits of

turf, the sea-shells, the squirts of water, the small showers of sand that rained upon him from nowhere; the disappearance of various cherished articles, and their discovery in impossible or unseemly places; the stones in his bedding, the dead mouse he had indignantly discovered in his tea; all these curious and bewildering misfortunes he had at last ascribed to their rightful source, and his cunning old mind perceived with an added resentment that, while the Sutherlands naturally did not encourage the boy, they were sometimes inclined to laugh at the pranks he played. Uncertain of sympathy, Joey grinned, and kept his own counsel.

Now, however, he had a fresh outrage to kindle his anger. Only two days ago, as he had sat chopping wood, the boy had brought him a parcel with stamps and writing on it, telling him the Dugald postman had forgotten to leave it, and had handed it to him at the top of the brae on his way back. Joey very occasionally received a parcel from the South, and the sight of it roused high expectations in his mind. He opened it eagerly, and found that it contained a small drowned kitten. On this occasion, the sympathies of the Sutherlands, and even of the girl Norah, had been against the boy. Joey had so few possessions, they thought it cruel to disappoint him. Joey lay low, his bushy brows hiding the gleam in his small pig eyes, grinned, and said nothing.

In the distance, the boy's voice could be heard, yodelling madly from the stalls, where he helped Mrs. Sutherland and Norah to milk the cows. There was no keeping him quiet. Mrs. Sutherland had complained time and again that he would put the creatures off their milk, but the facts had not supported her; even Daisy, the most nervous cow, stood unperturbed by the maniac outcry. Derek yodelled, sang songs, and kept up a perpetual stream of nonsense which half amused, half vexed the women. Norah, her small dark head snuggled tight against a cow's flank, paid little heed. She had her own thoughts, and the warmth of the shed, the rhythmic motion, the slow breathing of the cows, wrought her into a state of dream. Only when Derek sang out of time with the milking did she frown and call a sharp remonstrance. As often as not, the shouted reply would make her chuckle; but the boy liked her, and after a few seconds' persistence, to show that he was independent, he would change his tune.

John Sutherland, walking thick-legged over the cobbles outside, heard the yodelling, and scowled. He was usually near the danger line; a small thing sufficed to put him in a temper. He was a florid, thick-set man, at odds with his own body. Getting up early on dark winter mornings was hell to him. When he came in, long afterwards, for his breakfast, he could not digest it: his blood-pressure was high, and his nerves irritable. There were days when the very sound of the boy's voice so infuriated him that he had to go away behind a shed to regain command over himself. And yet, in a strange, unwilling way, he admired the boy's vitality, and recognised his talent for mischief as a part of it.

He crossed the yard, and went into the dairy. The door had been left open. There was a stir in the darkness, and with a sudden shriek a hen rushed wildly by him. The shock made his head sing and sent fountains of blood-red catherine wheels before his eyes. He swore savagely, and held on to the shelf for support. Damn the woman! He could never get his feckless, easy-going wife to realise the importance of locking the dairy door.

He slammed it, turned the key, and went into the scullery to wash. It was dark. He kicked against a pan, swore again, groped for the matches, and at a third attempt succeeded in lighting the lamp. Grimly and methodically he began to scrub his hands. Before he had finished, Mrs. Sutherland waddled in the doorway.

"Och, that boy," she exclaimed, brushing away a blowsy strand of hair with the back of her wet hand. "He's that saucy, I don't know what we're to do with him."

"Send him away," grunted her husband, rubbing vigorously at his wrist.

"What d'ye say, John?"

"I said we'd better get rid of him. He's too much trouble altogether."

"Ah, no, John." Mrs. Sutherland made her way across to get a towel from the nail. "Ah, no. We couldn't do that. I've a kindness for the boy." She chuckled to herself. "D'ye know what he was saying to Norah just now?"

"Do you know that I found the dairy door open just now?"

retorted John. "How many times have I got to tell you always to lock that door after you? One day the inspector will come, and then we'll be ruined."

"Did I leave it open, John? Indeed now, I'd have sworn I turned the key after me. Indeed I would."

"Is that so?" observed her husband sarcastically. "I expect the hen I found in there flew up and turned it with her beak to let herself in."

There was an uneasy silence, disturbed only by the sounds of scrubbing and rubbing.

"That boy," said Mrs. Sutherland presently, half to herself, "I wonder what he's at. I left him all ready to come in."

"Oh, he's fooling around somewhere," said John Sutherland gruffly. "You'd best go and find him."

She looked at him. "I don't know where he is," she said vaguely.

John Sutherland made an impatient noise, and went himself, hunching on his coat.

Derek at that moment was talking to Norah, before she went home. The girl, a dark green shawl about her shoulders, was leaning against the outside wall of the shed, looking with gentle amusement into his face. Filled with a strange emotion, half bold, half shy, the boy stood awkwardly over her, his outstretched arms against the wall on either side of her, penning her in.

"Ah, go on," she teased him. "What do you know about it?"

"I know plenty," he swore.

"Yes, you do!"

"Yes I do," he retorted angrily. "Here, I'll show you, if you don't believe me..."

"Get away."

She seized his wrists, and held them, smiling at him. He could barely see the expression of her face in the dusk.

"I am strong," he warned her. "You'd better let go before..."

"You're only a wee bit of a boy," she advised him. "Now get on in, and don't be thinking about such things."

"I..." he began protesting, when John Sutherland's heavy step sounded on the cobbles.

"Quick." The girl jumped away from the wall, gave him a quick kiss, drew her shawl about her shoulders, and was gone like a shadow. Sutherland rounded the corner.

"Where have you been, you young devil?" he bellowed wrathfully. His eye caught a glimpse of the figure moving quickly across the field. "You leave that girl alone, do you hear? And next time you make a nuisance of yourself to Mrs. Sutherland, I'll have the hide off you. Do you hear me now?"

He stumped away without waiting for an answer. The boy, as soon as his back was well turned, made a hideous grimace after him. "Old sour-sides," he muttered: and, as often happened, a feeling of self pity rose in his spirit. That was the worst of being a waif. He was at everyone's beck and call. If he only had a father and a mother, now, he'd have to take orders from none but them, and not be bullied about by any red-faced farmer and his fat, silly wife. Never mind—when he grew up, he'd have a fine farm of his own, and drive them all bankrupt, so that they'd have to come begging to him for work; and then see how he'd have them skipping! So joyous was the contemplation that, before he knew what he was doing, he had let three blood-curdling whoops and turned a cartwheel.

John Sutherland heard him. His thick neck flushed, and he gritted his teeth. The next chance he got, he would give the boy something to remember him by.

The chance came two days later. Derek and Norah, for want of better occupation, had been set to spend the afternoon weeding in the yard. Grass and groundsel were always sprouting up between the cobblestones, where they flourished unnoticed till Sutherland happened to be in a bad temper and at the same time to find his dependents unoccupied. Then he would call their attention with oaths to the state of the yard, and bid them tidy it.

The work was irksome, but the two made light of it. It was a glorious afternoon, with a touch of frost in the air to quicken the blood of all young life. They talked and laughed together as they worked, kneeling on thick bundles of sacking, and leaning forward with one hand on the ground for support as they plucked up the little dangling bits of grass and earth. Derek was in the highest spirits:

he mimicked Norah, and described imaginary conversations between her and various admirers.

"Ssh," she said, in shocked, delighted tones as his voice rose too loud; and then, on receipt of some more than usually outrageous impudence, she made a grab at his leg. He rolled quickly out of reach, and began pelting her with the tiny sods of turf. Laughing and spluttering, for his aim was good, she jumped to her feet, seized a handful, and began to pelt him back.

John Sutherland, working moodily at the door of the woodshed, had heard their voices. It irritated him that they should talk and laugh. At last, hearing Norah's subdued screams, and Derek's hobnails on the cobbles, he muttered a furious oath, and hurried round the corner to abuse them. His arrival was unhappily timed. At the instant he appeared, Norah, driven back by merciless fire, saw a whole handful of ammunition coming, and ducked wildly. John Sutherland received the full charge. Earth burst round him like shrapnel, and the largest missile took him neatly in the eye. With a gasp Norah fled. Horrified, fascinated, Derek stood his ground.

The farmer was helpless. Pain blinded him: the tears rained down his face. He stood for a moment, confronting the boy: then, clapping a hand over his injured eye, he blundered off towards the wash-house.

Norah, her wits recovered, met him.

"My, Mr. Sutherland, but I'm awful sorry," she exclaimed solicitously. "Here, come this way, give me your hand. Is it right in your eye? My, I'm awful sorry."

His dependence on her made Sutherland forget her part in the blame. Without a word, he let her lead him into the wash-house, and sat helplessly on a bucket while she ministered to his eye with a cloth wrung out in water. She had hastily washed her hands under the tap: the touch of her fingers was cool, firm, and comforting. Her genuine sympathy with his misfortune smoothed away the last of his anger against her. He rose at last from the bucket, and stood awkwardly, his eye smarting, but clean.

"Thank you," he mumbled—feeling that it was all wrong somehow, that he had been tricked on to the other side of the fence; and then, bewilderment reminding him of what had happened, his anger

flamed up savagely against the boy. By God, when he caught him—

With a thick choking sound, he rushed out of the wash-house and gazed around with bleared and furious eyes. The boy was nowhere in sight; and suddenly he realised that, if he caught him, he could no longer trust himself. A murderous hatred rose and flamed in his veins. The air around him seemed to have become close and stifling. He threw back his head, and tried to draw a deep, satisfying breath, but there was no sustenance in the air, and the very ground started to betray him, swaying and swinging under his feet. He heard a strange gurgling noise, and realised that it came from himself. With a convulsive effort, he ripped open the neck of his shirt. Ah, that was better. The air became suddenly cool and sweet; he drew it deep into his lungs in laboured gasps. The earth became solid and reassuring once again; the sea and the islands still swam and skidded, but they slowed visibly, and he stood savouring the end of the phenomenon with something like amusement. Then, at once, he set off to walk to the farthest end of his domain. He felt unsteady at first, and walked with the deliberate purpose of the man who is a little drunk. That infernal boy had got on his nerves, was destroying his peace of mind. He would have to get rid of him. It would be easy to send him away, to slip a word to the priest, saying that the young villain was out of hand, that he was afraid for Norah, any tale; and he felt the righteous, considerate glow of a man whose motives are taken at their face value, and who appears modestly in a good light, as one who is only anxious to do his best and consider the good of those under his care.

Look at those cursed cows. Was there anywhere in human earth they would not get to, once they had the chance? They were all dotted along the plateau on the top of the tiny cliff, where, thrown into prominence by the late sunshine and their own shadows, they looked twice their proper size. To get up there, they would have had to go one by one along a winding, difficult path, plunge their way through a most forbidding thicket of shrubs and brambles, and climb a wooded, boggy slope over which the trees grew so thickly that it was half dark at midsummer noon. That infernal boy would have a time of it getting them down, anyway. Senseless brutes! What on earth did they want to go up there for? The pasture was no better than down below; rather worse.

He felt the ominous tide of rage rising in him again, and resolutely turned his back upon the cows and all to do with them. He would go out to the rocks beyond the southernmost field, and see if there was a seal. John Sutherland could whistle beautifully, and it gave him great pleasure to fascinate seals with his music.

An hour and a half later, he returned, at peace with the world. The sun had set amid corrugations of coppery splendour that foretold rain. A corn upon Sutherland's left little toe insisted on adding its voice to the prognostications, but not so loudly as to spoil his mood. He had heard the distant ululations of Derek fetching home the cows without concern. The sea always brought him peace, and he envied his brother, a pilot at Fort Augustus. Yet, on an evening like this, there was little to complain of in his lot. What farm on the West Coast could compare, for looks and for variety, with his own? Very comfortably they got along. If only it were a bit nearer the station, so that he need not get up so early in the mornings. That was all that was wrong; the want of rest, and the aggravation of that cursed boy. Yet the boy, he was forced to admit, might turn out well one day. He had great vitality, he was strong, and, if he was too lively and too mischievous, that was a good fault. Better one with devil in him than one of the meek, sly, thieving, grovelling sort. This boy had courage, anyway.

The western light held the sky as Sutherland walked across the field to his farm. Barely had his feet sounded on the cobbles, when Mrs. Sutherland ran out to meet him. She was almost in tears.

"Och, John, John," she wailed. "For goodness' sake will ye say something to that boy? He'll be the death of us all yet. He tried to drive Julia in here on top of me, and the poor beast got herself stuck in the door, and went mad with the fright, and look at all this mess here; and she's run off over the brae, and we'll never get her in to milk..."

For a moment John Sutherland saw red. Then a furious calm settled down and gripped him like a vice; a reasoned, methodical rage.

"Where is the boy?" he asked through his teeth.

"Och, I don't know. Round behind somewhere."

She took a couple of apprehensive steps after him. "You won't be too hard on him," she called.

Rounding the corner, Sutherland all but fell over the boy. He seized him by the back of the neck, jerked him almost off his feet, and dragged him off to the woodshed.

The open door faced the fields and the West. Pale, unearthly light lay across the front of the floor and half one wall; the back of it was a warm, odorous gloom. Grasping a stick from the floor and shifting the grip of his left hand to the boy's shirt and braces, Sutherland began furiously to thrash him. The boy danced and writhed, kicking high in the air to escape the slashing blows on his legs and thighs. After missing him several times in succession, Sutherland flung him face downwards on a heap of logs, and belaboured him unmercifully before he could rise.

Then it happened. The boy twisted round, trying to get up and escape the rain of blows. He jerked to one side and Sutherland's stick took him fair across the face. With a scream he collapsed, and lay writhing, his face in his hands.

A sudden memory came back to John Sutherland. He was a child, playing with a kitten in the back garden of his father's house. Something distracted his attention: he turned, stumbled, and trod upon the kitten. Realising at once that it could not recover, in sick fascination and horror he had stamped upon it with his heel till it was crushed almost out of shape, and then, shuddering, with averted face, he had carried it off by the tail and buried it among the potatoes. For just so long as it took to remember this, John Sutherland stood, looking down at the writhing figure of the boy. Then, almost vomiting, seized by the same hideous compulsion, he struck six or seven times with all his might, till the figure lay still.

Stooping, and catching it by the braces, Sutherland dragged the limp figure to the back of the shed. He threw the stick down beside it, came out, and closed the door. His mind was perfectly calm and cool. Quickly and resolutely, it decided what to do. His wife was not in the dairy. He went down the narrow passage to the kitchen, and found her sitting by the table. She had a basket of sewing be-

side her, which she had not begun. She looked up anxiously as he came in.

"That'll teach him a lesson," said Sutherland, almost good-humouredly. He sat down beside the fire. "I've told him to go out and get Julia as soon as he feels a bit better; so he may be some time."

"He may indeed, the poor boy. She may have run miles by this time. Ah well," Mrs. Sutherland smiled weakly, and put out her hand for her sewing. "It'll please him just as well, I dare say. He never likes Norah or me to see him when he's been crying."

"Aye, like enough." John Sutherland held out his hands to the fire. It was like a game that he was playing, he reflected. The room looked so warm and usual. Who could believe what he had been at a bare five minutes ago. He could hardly believe it himself.

"Where's Joey?" he said, turning round suddenly to his wife.

"He ought to be back any time now. He went down to clear out the drain above the narrow bay."

John Sutherland rose, patting his pocket for his tobacco pouch.

"I will go down to meet him, I think, and see how he has got on. It's a grand evening."

His wife looked sideways at him over her work, and quickly dropped her eyes. Such good-humour was unusual. She prayed that nothing might break it.

"Aye, do," she said.

Sutherland went slowly across the fields, stopping only for a moment to light his pipe. Dusk had fallen; the light was tricky now. There was plenty of it in the sky, but for all that you had to look hard to see just how far a thing was from your feet. A chill was rising from the grass. The sea was calm, and infinitely far away from the land. The peaks of the farthest island were a dark shadow on a shadow almost as dark.

Sutherland did not see Joey till he almost ran into him, the old man rising suddenly out of a hollow in the ground, his beard gleaming in the twilight.

"Is that you, Joey?" he asked unnecessarily, more by way of greeting than inquiry.

"Aye, master. I saw you a long time," he added, for no purpose that was apparent to the other.

"Did you manage it?"

"Aye, I managed well enough, but the ground is very soggy. My leg was always sticking in it."

By his leg Joey always meant his wooden leg. His own he did not appear to think worthy of the title.

Sutherland turned, and the two began slowly to walk back together.

"Joey."

"Aye, master?"

"That boy. He's been up to his tricks again. Tried to drive Julia into the dairy. I've had to give him a lathering."

Joey grinned. "That'll do him no harm," he observed.

"Aye, but that's just it, Joey. He jumped about, and I hit him one I wouldn't be able to answer for."

Joey's face worked like a mask of India-rubber. His eyes disappeared into a network of wrinkles visible even in that light.

"You mean you fetched him one the law wouldn't allow you?" he queried eagerly.

"Yes, Joey, more than one."

Joey stopped, and peered at his master.

"You've finished him?" he whispered.

"Yes, Joey. Seeing I'd gone so far, I thought I might as well go further." He took hold of Joey's arm. "I want you to help me stick him out of the way, Joey. And back me up afterwards. Will you?"

"That I will." Joey gave his master a long glance of mingled animal cunning and devotion. "He is killed, for sure?" he whispered.

"He may not be, but he's as near as makes no matter."

Joey nodded, his head waggling up and down as if it were loose.

"We'll finish the job," he said with relish. "And we'll put him well down in the sand by the midden. Nobody digs there but me."

Sutherland nodded, and the pair went back to the farm in silence. Obeying some instinct, they skirted the cobbles, and made their way on tiptoe to the woodshed. Sutherland started, and swore to himself.

The door was ajar. He flung it open and rushed to the back of the shed. Joey heard him fumbling and cursing; then there was the scrape of a match, and a wan, tiny flame came to being in the darkness.

Sutherland stood in stupefaction.

"————" he said. "The girl... McAndrew's croft... He'll have gone to her. He can't have got far," he added anxiously. "Look Joey—you run on ahead, while I go and fetch my gun. We must get him. He can't have gone far."

Two minutes later, he was running with quick steps across the field, the gun under his arm. The figure of Joey, lurching comically but travelling at high speed, appeared in front of him. He caught him up, and together the two climbed the sandhills. Sutherland's heart was pounding in his ribs: indeed, Joey took the slope better than he did, loose sand and all. Reaching the top, they peered in all directions. It was hard to see anything.

"He's come this way," puffed Joey. "The rabbits are all in."

Rage rose once again in Sutherland's veins, and he stamped his foot. Short of searching with a light, which might attract attention, they would never find the boy.

"Aah."

Joey clutched his sleeve and pointed. A dark shape was crawling over a patch of sand below them on their left. The farmer said nothing. His fat legs twinkling, he ran down the slope. A rise hid the crawling figure from him; but he topped it, and with a grunt of satisfaction saw his prey before him.

Hearing his pursuer, the boy turned round. He made no attempt to escape, but leaned back on his elbow. The last of the light, falling on his upturned face, showed it vaguely swollen and distorted. Weakly, he raised a hand to protect himself.

Sutherland stooped over him. Reaching down, with his left hand he tore open the front of the boy's shirt, and placed the double muzzle of the gun against his bare flesh. Then, straightening up, he discharged both barrels. For an instant the body arched upwards, and the ribs thrust against the gun, making Sutherland give almost in consternation before the pressure: then it collapsed like a deflated bag. Sutherland put his gun under his arm, and stood, looking down at the body.

A whoofling and puffing behind him announced Joey.

Sutherland turned round to him abruptly.

"Stop here," he said. "I must get a rabbit."

He could not see Joey's face properly, but he knew from experience the ludicrous expression of bewilderment which it would wear.

"On the way back," said Joey at last.

"Damn it all, man," cried Sutherland, his sudden irritation seizing him again, "it'll be black as your hat in another five minutes. Stop where I tell you."

He strode off, fishing in his pocket for cartridges, leaving Joey on guard over the body. Regaining his breath, Joey peered about him. He felt no apprehension, only his ordinary animal interest in his surroundings. A star was twinkling over the hill. The sea was sounding in the sandy bay to the West: Joey leaned back his head, and sniffed rain. Then he heard a bang, and another bang. Grinning, he stooped, and with sudden agility slung the boy's body over his shoulder. He had not stumped far when a shadowy figure stepped out of nowhere and joined him.

"There you are," said Sutherland, swinging a rabbit against his leg. "Someone may have heard the bang. You never know."

It was not far to the rubbish dump. A drain, cut across the field, carried the farm sewage to this bed in the sandhills, a small malodorous desert of tins, bones, and all manner of refuse. Joey dropped the body with a thud, and scrambled off to get the old rusty grip which he kept in a disused rabbit-hole. The two took it in turns to dig. Before they had finished, a fine rain was falling, drifting in softer and softer from the sea. A final clanking as a few tins were scattered over the grave, and all was done.

"We'll have to go out early, in the morning, in case he left a trail."

"I'll do it, master," said Joey eagerly. "I'll be up before it's light."

Sutherland turned up the collar of his coat, and the two made their way back to the farm. Sutherland hesitated by the woodshed door.

"I'll look in there too," said Joey.

Sutherland nodded, and led the way into the little scullery. A lamp was burning on the dresser: he could hear his wife moving about upstairs. Taking down the lamp, he held it so that the light fell on his companion. The pale, mad face looked at him with a steadfast happiness.

Sutherland frowned, and looked closer. "There's blood on your coat," he said.

Joey squinted comically downwards. Then he looked up again. "I could rub it off," he suggested.

"No, no." A feeling of affection rose in John Sutherland's heart. "Better burn it, or bury it somewhere. I'll give you my old frieze coat instead."

Joey's eyes beamed like a dog's.

"I'll bury this to-night," he said, "and burn it tomorrow or the next day."

"We'll say the boy ran away," said John. "True enough, he did, too."

"Oho," chuckled Joey. "So he did too. That's true. So he did. Good riddance to him."

They stood smiling, looking at one another, nodding, like men who had done a good deed and were satisfied with it.

HOUSE OF CONFIDENCE

by

Gordon Barrington

CHARLIE and I sail into the harbor in the late afternoon and as we see the monastery on the south hill and the eighty-odd identical mussel-fishing barges lined up against the breakwater and the ferris-wheel on the side of Tibidabo hill we realize well enough we're again in Barcelona. And then we come up in front of the landing-stage and the cars of the cross-harbor funicular swing high over our heads and seem to be coming out to meet us, like somebody who can't wait till the boat gets to land, and we see Columbus up on top of his high black pedestal at the foot of the Rambla pointing to America, and we feel like we're welcome in the town.

We haven't been on land long before it begins to get dark and we haven't found a place to stay for the night yet, and so we ask the waiter at the cafe if he knows of a cheap place we could stay and he says he might be able to get us something in a private house if the woman hasn't gone to bed yet. It is only seven o'clock and we wonder why she should go to bed so early but the waiter explains that she is very old.

Her place is on the third floor but since it is Spain it is not until we have given all we have to five steep flights that we arrive in front of the woman's door. The waiter rings the bell and there is no response. Then he rings it again and there is no response and we begin to fear that she has gone to bed. But then we hear the soft swish of slippers moving towards the door from the inside, and a second later we hear the rattling of chain on the inside of the door. Then there comes slowly a narrow opening and in the opening comes the face of the old lady.

"What do you want?" she says, in Castillano.

The waiter explains that he has a couple of foreigners with him

who want to stay there for the night and she says she wants to see our passports. It is black as night behind the woman and she is dressed all in black and all we can see of her in the narrow opening is her white face; and we can't see that very distinctly because she holds herself back in the darkness where the light in the hall can't get at her. There are a couple of black slits which must be her eyes and a large black hole in the location of her mouth, and we make out that she is squinting with her mouth open apparently trying to penetrate into the characters of Charlie and me. We tell her that we'll come in and show her the passports but she draws back and moves the door as though to close it and says she must see the passports before we can come in. We don't like this but we'd climbed a long ways up the stairs with heavy bags and so we find the passports and hand them in to her through the opening at the door. She takes them and goes through all the pages of each passport, and then opens the door and we come in.

She leads us in the dark half a dozen steps down a hallway and then opens a door on the left and we follow her into a room, which is also fairly dark. It is a long narrow room with a tall window at the end which runs from the floor to the ceiling and in the window sits a woman in a chair holding something in front of her and looking straight ahead and not moving at all. The room looks out over the Rambla and some light comes in the window from the outside but we can see very little until finally the old lady snaps on the electric light. It is the first time we get a good look at her and she stands there looking more like a house cat than anything else we can think of. Her back is long and curved which brings her head forward away from the rest of her body, she has a slight moustache, her hair, which is partly black and partly gray, is done up with two rolls, one on either side of her head looking like ears, and she is fairly lean. It seems as though she has only one expression for her face, the one she looked at us with in the doorway where her eyes were squinted and her mouth was open, and she is looking at us this way now as she begins to talk. We get the idea from the expression that she is either bewildered or shrewd.

"It is a family here," she says. "This is the house of my fathers

and this room has a view which is the best in Barcelona."

We figure for the first time that she wants to let us stay at her place and we begin to glance around the room. There's not much there besides a three-quarters bed and a cot which run one in front of the other, an old-fashioned clothes cabinet, three different pictures of Christ, and the tall window. The woman who is sitting there we see now is old too and she continues to be motionless and to look straight ahead of her and we see that it is a hand of cards she is holding in front of her and it looks like she's been figuring out a move all this time. The cards are right up close to her eyes and we can see that she has on two pairs of glasses and has a cataract on one eye and hardly realizes we are in the room.

"You have luck to find me up," continues the old lady who is in the house of her fathers. "I have the custom to go to bed at seven o'clock; but I have here with me a friend who has come to see me."

The old woman in the window seems to hear this and becomes self-conscious and brings the cards down into her lap and turns her head towards the Rambla and looks out over the city. I notice that there is an empty chair opposite her in the window and on the seat of the chair is another hand of cards, face down, and half a dozen small white beans. It looks like they've been having a game and using the beans to keep score with. In the lap of the guest there is one bean.

I ask Charlie what he thinks of the room and he says it looks all right and the waiter says it's as good as she has and that we might have trouble getting anything else it is so late and so we ask the old lady how much we can stay here for.

She repeats that we have luck to find her up and then says: "All the people are good here. It is like a family. It is the house of my fathers and it has a good name. It is a house of confidence. A man from Tarragona had this room for the Exposition and he paid me three pesetas, but the two of you will stay here for five pesetas."

We figure this is all right and so we move the bags over against the wall and tell her we will take the room and then I tell her we're going out now because it is too early for us to go to bed. The old lady's mouth closes for a second and then she opens it again and says: "You

shall wait here a moment until I get you a key. All are equal here." And she shuffles in her slippers out of the room. In a couple of minutes she is back again with the key and also has two name-cards in her hand, one for Charlie and one for me. She says she had them made in nineteen five when her daughter was married and they look older than the woman herself. They are turning yellow and have Elena Roig Hugas and her address all in Old English written on them. "House of confidence," she says to us each in turn as she hands us the cards. Then she just has the key in her hand but before she offers it to us she says we must pay her for two days in advance. This we don't like at all and I ask her if she doesn't trust us and Charlie asks her if it's a family or isn't it; but she says something about maintenance, and then something about mutual confidence which even the waiter doesn't get, and finally we give up and hand her the pesetas. She breaks into a contented smile and I imagine I can hear her purring and she gives us the key and says she will regulate the beds and bring the water.

The old woman who is sitting in the window has dozed off to sleep now. Her head is bent forward burying her chin in her front, she is holding one hand with the other before her, and the cards lie scattered in her lap. The bean that was there has rolled off onto the floor.

Charlie and the waiter and I go out into the hall and down to the door that leads to the stairway and our landlady follows us to the door. We go out and start down the stairs, and as we look back the old lady is standing in the dark behind the partly opened door saying *'Dios* softly and motioning with her hand for us to come here by which we know she means go with God but come back soon, and we say *Adios* too and go down the stairs.

It's several hours before Charlie and I are back at the house of confidence again; and we have left the waiter at the cafe. Since it is after ten o'clock we have had to call the doorkeeper for the block who has let us in off the Rambla and given Charlie a thin lighted candle for us to see our way up the stairs. We get to the door just as the candle begins to burn Charlie's fingers and it looks like the man has given us a first or second floor candle by mistake.

The key gets us in all right and we go down the hallway and open the door to our room and there we find Elena Roig Hugas sitting in the window—more than three hours overdue for bed. Her chin is in her hand and she seems to be looking down at the Rambla but when I put on the light she jumps nervously in the chair and lifts her head up and looks around at us with her eyes wider than we have seen them before, and we figure we have aroused her from a sleep. In a second or two the eyes are squinting again and her mouth is open and she gets up and walks towards us with a peseta piece held between her thumb and fore-finger, well out in front of her as if she wants to show it to us.

"This peseta does not have value," she says, arriving in front of me, "it lacks weight." The peseta seems to be one of those we have given her for the room.

I look at it and then say to her in Spanish: "For what reason do you say this? What do you mean it lacks weight?"

She shows us a small nick on the edge of the coin, and it looks like someone has given it a slight rap with a coal-chisel.

"You must give me another peseta for this one," she says, turning it over and over in her palm. "I cannot use this. It is not worth anything, either in the shops or at the banks."

"It appears that you think we carry bad money," says Charlie, getting warm.

"No, senor. I do not say this. It is a family here and all are equal and all are good and you are good, but I have fear that someone has given you bad money because you are foreigners."

I'm getting sleepier all the time and I don't feel like arguing so late at night about a nick in a coin and so I take a peseta piece out of my pocket and hand it to her for this one. She looks it over carefully and then says, "This is better, senores. This has value." Then she wears a contented smile again and says, "You are good people. And I am sorry you have been deceived. In the morning I will bring you hot water and you will shave." She keeps the new peseta and hands me the one she doesn't like and then she says good night to both of us and goes out of the room.

I stand in the window and look down the Rambla and at the foot

of it I can see one of the cars of the funicular swinging across from the beach side of the harbor towards the Tower of San Jaime. It carries one big yellow light on the front and as it passes behind the black pedestal of Columbus the light is hidden for a second and then it appears again and it seems like an eye that's winking at me. Then the car swings along on its way and Columbus stands there alone up against the stars pointing to America, and pointing more specifically, I figure, to a small town in Massachusetts where there is the house of my fathers.

YELLOW GIRL

by

Erskine Caldwell

NELL stood at the kitchen window packing the basket of eggs. She arranged eleven white eggs carefully, placing the cottonseed hulls between them so that none would be broken. The last one to be put in was large and brown and a little dirty. She dipped it into a pan of soap and water and wiped it dry with a fresh dishtowel. Even then she was not pleased with the way it looked, because it was brown; all the other eggs in the basket were as white as October cotton bolls.

Behind her in the room, Myrtie was scouring the two frying-pans in soapy water with a cloth dipped in sand. Nell laid down the brown egg and called Myrtie.

"Here's another of those big brown eggs, Myrtie," she said, pointing at the egg. "Do you have any idea where they come from? Have you seen any strange hens in the yard? There must be a visiting hen laying eggs in the chicken house."

Myrtie laid down the frying-pan and came over to the little table by the window. She picked up the large brown egg and examined it. The egg no longer looked brown. It was exactly the color of her hands. Nell looked at the egg again, wondering why in Myrtie's hands it had apparently changed color.

"Where do these brown eggs come from, Myrtie?" she asked. "There was one last week, and now today there's this. It was in the basket Willis brought in from the chicken house, but he said he forgot to notice which nest he took it from."

Myrtie turned the egg over in her hands, feeling the weight of it and measuring its enormous circumference with her fingers.

"Don't ask me, Miss Nell," Myrtie said, staring at the egg. "I've never seen a flock of Leghorns yet, though, that didn't lay a few brown eggs, sometime or other. Looks like it just can't be helped."

"What do you mean, Myrtie? What on earth are you talking about? Of course, Leghorns lay white eggs; this is a brown egg."

"I'm not saying the Leghorns lay them, Miss Nell, and I'm not saying they don't. Those old Buff Orpingtons and Plymouth Rocks and Domineckers lay funny-looking eggs, too, sometimes. I wouldn't take-on so much about finding one measly brown egg, though. I've never seen anybody yet, white or colored, who knew how such things happen. But I wouldn't worry about it, Miss Nell. Brown eggs are just as good as white eggs, to my way of tasting."

Nell turned her back on Myrtie and looked out the window until the girl had returned to the other side of the kitchen. Nell disliked to talk to Myrtie, because Myrtie pretended never to know the truth about anything. Even if she did know, she would invariably evade a straightforward answer. Myrtie would begin talking, and talk about everything under the sun from morning to night, but she would never answer a question that she could evade. Nell always forgave her, though; she knew Myrtie was not consciously evading the truth. There was scarcely a colored person she had ever seen who would not talk the same way.

While the girl was scouring the pans, Nell picked up the egg again and looked at it closely. Mrs. Farrington had a flock of Dominique chickens, and she gathered in her chicken house eggs of all sizes, shapes, and colors. But that was to be expected, Mrs. Farrington had said, because she had two old roosters that were of no known name or breed. Nell had told Mrs. Farrington that some of her Dominiques were mixed-bred, and consequently they produced eggs of varying sizes, shapes, and colors; but Mrs. Farrington continued to lay all the blame on her two roosters, that, she said, were a mixture of all breeds.

Once more Nell dipped the brown egg into the pan of water and wiped it with the fresh dishtowel, but the egg remained as brown as it was at the first. The egg was clean, but soap and water would not alter its size and color. It was a brown egg, and it would remain brown. Nell gave up, finally; she realized that she could never change it in any way. If she had had another egg to put in the basket in its place, she would have laid it aside and substituted a white one; but

she had only a dozen, counting the brown one, and she wished to have enough to make an even exchange with Mrs. Farrington when she went over after some green peas.

Before she finally placed the egg in the basket with the others, she glanced out the window to see where Willis was. He was sitting in the crib door shelling seed corn into an old wooden lard pail.

"I'm going over to Mrs. Farrington's now to exchange for some peas," she told Myrtie. "Keep the fire going good, and put on a pan of water to boil. I'll be back in a little while." She turned around and looked at Myrtie. "Suppose you mash the potatoes today, for a change, Myrtie. Mr. Willis will like them that way."

"Are you going to take that big egg, Miss Nell?" Myrtie asked, looking down at it in the basket of eleven Leghorns.

"Certainly," she said. "Why?"

"Mrs. Farrington will be surprised to see it in with all those white ones, won't she, Miss Nell?"

"Well, what if she does see it?" Nell asked impatiently.

"Nothing, Miss Nell," Myrtie said. "But she might want to know where you got it. She knows we've got Leghorn hens, and she might think one of her Domineckers laid it."

"I can't help that," Nell said, turning away. "And, besides, she should keep her Dominiques at home if she doesn't want them to lay eggs in somebody else's chicken house."

"That's right, Miss Nell," Myrtie said. "She sure ought to do that. She ought to keep her Domineckers at home."

Nell was annoyed by the girl's comments. It was none of Myrtie's business, anyway. Myrtie was getting to be impertinent, and she was forgetting that she was a hired servant in the house. Nell left the kitchen determined to treat Myrtie more coolly after that. She could not allow a colored cook to tell her what to do and what not to do.

Willis was sitting in the crib door shelling the red seed corn. He glanced up when she came down the back steps, and looked at her. He stopped shelling corn for a moment to wipe away the white flakes of husk that clung to his eyes.

"I'm going over to Mrs. Farrington's now and exchange a basket of eggs for some green peas, Willis," she said. "I'll not be gone long."

"Maybe she won't swap with you today," Willis said. He stopped and looked up at her through the cloud of flying husk that hovered around him. "How do you know she will want to take eggs for peas today, Nell?"

"Don't be foolish, Willis," she said, smiling at him; "why wouldn't she take eggs in exchange today?"

"She might get to wondering where that big brown egg came from," he said, laughing. "She might think it's an egg one of her hens laid."

Nell stopped, but she did not turn around. She waited, looking towards the house.

"You're as bad as Myrtie, Willis."

"In which way is that?"

The moment he spoke, she turned and looked at him. He was bending over to pick up an ear of seed corn.

"I didn't mean to say that, Willis. Please forget that I said it. I didn't mean anything like that."

"Like what?"

"Nothing," she said, relieved. "It wasn't anything; I've even forgotten what it was I said. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said, looking after her.

Nell turned and walked quickly out of the yard and went around the corner of the building towards the road. The Farrington house was half a mile away, but by taking the path through the cotton field, it was two or three hundred yards nearer. She crossed the road and entered the field, walking quickly along the path with the basket of eggs on her arm.

Half way to the Farringtons', Nell turned around and looked back to see if Willis were still sitting in the crib door shelling seed corn. She did not know why she stopped and looked back, but even though she could not see him there or anywhere else in the yard, she went on towards the Farringtons without thinking of Willis again.

Mrs. Farrington was sitting on the back porch peeling turnips when Nell turned the corner of the house and walked across the yard. There was a bucket of turnips beside Mrs. Farrington's rocking-chair, and long purple peelings were lying scattered on the porch floor around

her, twisted into shapes like apple peelings when they are thrown over the shoulder. Nell ran up the steps and picked up the longest peeling she could find; she picked up the peeling before she even spoke to Mrs. Farrington.

"Sakes alive," Mrs. Farrington said; "why are you throwing turnip peelings over your shoulder, Nell? Doesn't that good-for-nothing husband of yours love you any more?"

Nell dropped the turnip peeling and tore it into short pieces and threw them into the bucket. She blushed and sat down in the chair beside Mrs. Farrington.

"Of course, he loves me," Nell said. "I suppose I did that so many times when I was a little girl that I still have the habit."

"You mean it's because you haven't grown up yet," the woman said, chuckling to herself. "I used to be just like that myself; but, sakes alive, it doesn't last always, girl."

Both of them laughed, and looked away, one from the other. Over across the cotton field a cloud of white dust hung close to the earth. Mr. Farrington and the colored men were planting cotton, and the earth was so dry that it rose up in the air when it was disturbed by the mules hooves and the cotton planters. There was no wind to carry the dust away, and it hung over the men and mules, hiding them from sight.

Presently Mrs. Farrington dropped a peeled turnip into the pan and folded her hands in her lap. She looked at Nell, noting her neatly combed hair and her clean gingham frock and her white hands. Mrs. Farrington turned away again after that and gazed once more at the cloud where her husband was at work.

"Maybe you and Willis will always be like that," she said. "Seems like you and Willis are still in love with each other. As long as he stays at home where he belongs and doesn't run off at night, it's a pretty sure sign he isn't getting ready to chase after another woman. Sakes alive, men can't always be depended upon to stay at home, though; they go riding off when you are least looking for them to."

Nell sat up, startled by what Mrs. Farrington had said, terrified by the directness of her comments.

"Of course, Willis wouldn't do a thing like that," she said confi-

dently. "I know he wouldn't. Willis wouldn't do anything like that. That's impossible, Mrs. Farrington."

Mrs. Farrington glanced at Nell, and then once more she looked across the field where the planting was being done. The cloud of white dust followed the men and mules, covering them.

"Seems to me like men are always saying something about being compelled to go to Macon on business, and even up to Atlanta sometimes," she said, ignoring Nell. "And then there are the times when they say they have got to go to town at night. Seems like they are always going off to town at night."

Several Dominique hens came from under the porch and stopped in the yard to scratch the hard white sand. They scratched listlessly; they went through the motions of scratching as if they knew of nothing else to do. They bent their long necks and looked down at the chicken-scrawls they had made with their claws, and then they walked aimlessly away neither surprised nor angry for not having unearthed a worm to devour. One of them began singing in the heat, drooping her wings until they dragged on the sand. The other hens paid no attention to her, strolling away without interest in the doleful music.

"You have pretty chickens, Mrs. Farrington," Nell said, watching the Dominiques waddle across the yard to the shaded dust holes and sit down in them as though they were nests.

"They're nothing but Dominiques," she said; "sakes alive, a body can't call them much of a breed, but they do get around to laying an egg or two once in a while."

Nell glanced down at the basket of eggs in her lap, covering the brown egg with her hand. She looked quickly at Mrs. Farrington to see if the older woman had noticed what she had done.

"How are your Leghorns laying now, Nell?" she asked.

"Very well. Willis gathered sixteen eggs yesterday."

"My Dominiques seem to be taking a spell of resting. I only gathered two eggs yesterday, and that's not enough for a hungry man and a kitchenful of blacks. Sakes alive, we were saying only last night that we wished you would bring over some eggs in a day or two. And now, here you are with some."

"I thought you might let me have some green peas for dinner,"

Nell said, lifting the basket and setting it on the floor. "Willis likes green peas at this time of year, and ours haven't begun to bear yet."

"You're welcome to as many as you want," Mrs. Farrington said. "Just walk into the kitchen, Nell, and look on the big table and you'll find a bushel basket of them. Help yourself to all you think you and Willis will want. We've got more than we can use. Sakes alive, there'll be another bushel ready for picking tomorrow, too."

Nell went into the kitchen and placed the eleven Leghorn eggs and the big brown one in a pan. She filled the basket with green garden peas and came back to the porch, closing the screen noiselessly behind her.

"Sit down, Nell," Mrs. Farrington said, "and tell me what's happening. Sakes alive, I sit here all day and never hear a word of what's going on."

"Why, I haven't heard of anything new," Nell said.

"What's Willis doing now?"

"He's getting ready to plant corn. He was shelling the seed when I left home. He should be ready to begin planting this afternoon. The planter broke down yesterday, and he had to send to Macon for a new spoke-chain. It should be here in the mail today."

"Myrtie is still there to help you with the house, isn't she?"

"Yes, Myrtie is still there."

The hens lying in the dust holes in the shade of the sycamore tree stood up and flapped their wings violently, beating the dust from their feathers. They stretched, one leg after the other, and flapped their wings a second time. One of them spread her legs, bending her knees as if she were getting ready to squat on the ground, and scratched the hard sand five or six times in quick succession. The other hens stood and watched her while she bent her long neck and looked down at the chicken-scratches on the sand. She looked for several seconds at the marks she had made and then, wiping her beak on her leg as one whets a knife-blade, she turned and waddled back across the yard and under the porch. The other hens followed her, singing in the heat.

"Couldn't you find a black woman to help you with the house?" Mrs. Farrington asked.

"A black woman?" Nell said. "Myrtie is colored."

"She's colored, all right," Mrs. Farrington said; "but, sakes alive, she isn't black. Myrtie is yellow."

"Well, that's all right, isn't it?" Nell asked. "She's yellow, and she is a fairly good cook. I don't know where I could find a better one for the pay."

"I reckon I'd heap rather have a black girl and a bad cook than to have a yellow girl and the finest cook in the whole country."

Nell glanced quickly at Mrs. Farrington, but her head was turned, and she did not look at Nell.

There was a long silence between them until finally Nell felt that she must know what Mrs. Farrington was talking about.

One of the Dominique hens suddenly appeared on the bottom step. She came hopping up to the porch, a step at a time. When she reached the last one, Mrs. Farrington said "Shoo!" The hen flew to the yard and went back under the porch.

"You don't mean—"

Mrs. Farrington began rocking slowly, backward and forward. She gazed steadily across the field where her husband was planting cotton with the colored men.

"You don't mean that Willis and a nigger—"

One of the roosters strutted across the yard, his eye first upon the hens under the porch and next upon the two women, and stopped midway to stand and fix his eye upon Mrs. Farrington and Nell. He stood jerking his head from side to side, his hanging red comb blinding his left eye, while he listened to the squeaking of Mrs. Farrington's chair. After a while he continued across the yard and went out of sight behind the smokehouse.

"Mrs. Farrington, Willis wouldn't do anything like that!" Nell said excitedly.

"Like what?" Mrs. Farrington asked. "Sakes alive, Nell, I didn't say he would do anything."

"I know you didn't say it, Mrs. Farrington, but I thought you said it. I couldn't help thinking that you did say it."

"Well, that's different," she replied, much relieved. "I wouldn't want you to go telling Willis I did say it. Menfolks never under-

stand what a woman means, anyway, and when they are told that a woman says something about them, they sometimes fly off the handle something awful."

Nell got up and stood beside the chair. She wished she might run down the steps and along the path towards home without a second's delay, but she knew she could not jump up and leave Mrs. Farrington like that. She would have to pretend that she was not in such a great hurry to get home.

"You're not going so soon, are you, Nell? Why, sakes alive, it seems like you only got here two minutes ago."

"I know," she said, "but it's getting late, and I've got to go home and get these peas ready for dinner. I'll be back soon."

She walked slowly down the steps. Mrs. Farrington got up and followed her across the yard. When they reached the beginning of the path that led across the field, Mrs. Farrington stopped.

"I'm afraid I must hurry home now and hull the peas in time for dinner," Nell said, backing down the path. "I'll be back again in a few days, Mrs. Farrington. Thank you so much for the peas. Willis has wanted some for the past week or more."

"It's as fair an exchange as I can offer for the Leghorn eggs," she said, laughing. "Because if there's anything I like better than those white Leghorn eggs, I don't know what it is. Maybe I'll be asking you for a setting of them some day soon."

"Good-bye," Nell said, backing further and further away. She turned and walked several steps. "I'll bring you another basket soon."

It seemed as if she would never reach the house, even though it was only half a mile away. She could not run, because Mrs. Farrington was in the yard behind her watching, and she could not walk slowly, because she had to get home. She walked with her eyes on the path in front of her, forcing herself to keep from looking up at the house. She knew that if she did raise her eyes and look at it, she would never be able to keep herself from running. If she did that, Mrs. Farrington would see her.

It was not until she had at last reached the end of the path that she was able to look backward. Mrs. Farrington had left the yard, and

Nell ran across the road and around the side of the house towards the back porch.

Willis was nowhere within sight. She looked first at the crib where she hoped she would find him, but he was not there and the door was closed and locked. She looked down at the barn, but he was not there. When she glanced hastily over the fields, she was still unable to see him anywhere.

She stopped at the bottom step on the back porch. There was no sound within the house that she could hear, and not even the sound of Myrtie's foot-steps reached her ears. The place seemed to be entirely deserted, and yet she knew that could not be, because only half an hour before when she left to go to Mrs. Farrington's to exchange eggs, Willis was sitting in the crib door shelling seed corn, and Myrtie was in the kitchen scouring the two frying-pans.

Her hands went out and searched for the railing that led up the porch steps. Her hands could not find it, and her eyes would not let her see it.

The thought of Mrs. Farrington came back again and again. Mrs. Farrington, sitting on her own back porch, talking. Mrs. Farrington, sitting in a rocking-chair, looking. Mrs. Farrington, peeling purple-top turnips, talking about yellow girls.

Nell felt deathly sick. She felt as if she had been stricken with an illness that squeezed the core of her body. Deep down within herself, she was deathly ill. A pain that began by piercing her skull struck downward and downward until it became motionless in her stomach. It remained there, gnawing and biting, eating the organs of her body and drinking the flow of her blood. She sank limp and helpless upon the step. Although she did not know where she was, she could still see Mrs. Farrington. Mrs. Farrington, in the rocking-chair, looking. Mrs. Farrington, peeling purple-top turnips, talking about yellow girls.

Nell did not know how much later it was when she opened her eyes. The day was the color of the red corn Willis had been shelling when she had last seen him, and it swam in a sea so wide that she almost cried out in fear when she saw it. Slowly she remembered how she had come to be where she was.

Running up the steps and across the porch, she flung open the screen-door and went into the kitchen. Myrtie was standing beside the table mashing boiled Irish potatoes with a long fork that had seven tines. She looked up when Nell ran in, but she did not have an opportunity to speak. Nell ran through the dining-room and on into the front-room.

She paused a moment in the doorway, looking at Willis, at the room, at the daybed, at the floor, at the rugs, at the open door leading into their room. She stood looking at everything she could see. She looked at the pillows on the daybed, at the rugs on the floor, at the chairs against the wall, at the counterpane on their bed. Willis sat in front of her reading the paper that had just come in the mail, and he was smoking his pipe.

Willis looked up at her.

She ran and fell on her knees in front of him, forcing her body between his legs and locking her arms around his neck. She pressed her fevered face against him and closed her eyes as tightly as she possibly could.

"Did Mrs. Farrington exchange with you?" he asked. "I'll bet a pretty that she had something to say about a big brown egg being in a basketful of Leghorns."

Nell felt her body shake convulsively, as if she were shivering. She knew she had no control over it.

"Look here," he said, lifting her head and looking into her eyes. "I know where that brown egg came from. I remember now. There was one of Mrs. Farrington's old Dominecker hens over here yesterday morning. I saw her scratching in the yard, and she acted like she didn't give a cuss whether she clawed up a worm or not."

Nell felt herself shaking again, but she did not attempt to control herself. If she could only lie there close to Willis with her arms around his neck, she did not care how much she shivered. As long as he was there, she had Willis; when she stood up and walked out of the room, she would never again be that certain.

CAFE DU DOME

by

Alvah C. Bessie

"*CORDON, s'il vous plait!*" he cried into the darkened court, and stood in the damp air for a few minutes till the heavy door clicked loudly and opened. Then he stepped briskly onto the wet pavement, reached the corner and turned into Vaugirard. At long intervals the lamps burned dimly, each surrounded by a vaporous halo, and through the iron grating he looked into the dark, deserted gardens. A few people passed him, their mufflers drawn tightly about their throats, their black hats pulled down over their eyes. Their eyes flashed above the mufflers.

It would be foolish to go to the Dôme, he decided; I have not come thirty-two hundred miles to talk to Americans. He had refused the letters of introduction, the addresses, the telephone numbers to call. It was a matter of pride with him that he had found his own hotel, avoiding all establishments that bore the ambiguous legend: *Confort Moderne; Eau Chaude Coulante.* His hotel had been built in the eighteenth century, and while he had to shout from his court-yard window: "*Ee-da! l'eau chaude, s'il vous plaît!*" and wait till the maid brought up the iron pitcher, he compensated for it by bathing in the imagined associations of the place; by tapping the solid stone walls as he went out the door, imaging cavaliers with swords clattering at their sides; coaches drawn up to the bastioned door, their wheels splattered with mud, and masked ladies descending and hurrying into dark recesses. Then there was always the little café where Athos, Porthos and Aramis were presumed to have...

He turned left from Vaugirard into Guynemer, skirting the iron railings, and when the street ended crossed the gutter and turned right

into Vavin. It did not surprise him to realize he was going to the Dôme after all, and for the moment he regretted having refused the letters of introduction. In front of the bookstore he stopped and looked into the window—they had not yet drawn down the corrugated iron shutters—and there he sighed to see the books displayed for the benefit of "visiting firemen"; the *Susie Blackeyes* series, the copies of the *Kamasutra* and the *Perfumed Garden* of the Sheik Nefzaoui. He turned his eyes once more within, and rejoiced in the blissful loneliness —the fog and drizzle and the wet streets, the raucous taxi-horns; a thousand francs in his pocket. I am not going to the Dôme, he murmured; I am not going to the Dôme.

It was crowded as he entered, and he walked self-consciously through the throng, his muffler still tight about his throat and his black hat pulled down over his brows. A few people turned incurious eyes at him, and two girls smiled. *Keep it buttoned,* his friend had said that day the ship sailed, *remember what happened last time.* He smiled back, and for a moment was relieved to see there was no empty seat, and visioned himself once more on the street, his face wet with the drizzle. *These cases sometimes take as long as six months or a year to clear up. I do not like to make predictions.*

Then he saw the seat and debated whether he should sit next to her. She was there every time, and she was conspicuously beautiful, and every eye in the place turned intermittently to look at her. She resembled Raquel Meller, so he decided to take the seat. As he did, he could not help noticing the smiles, even the two men sitting beneath the glass case with the letters inside, looking up from their paper and pens and smiling at him. She moved over on the upholstered seat to make room, and she too smiled. They would have to share the same table. He coughed.

"Café crême," he said to the waiter, *"et un croissant."*

"Café crême."

He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, but she was paying no attention to him. He lit a cigarette. *I do not care to make predic-*

tions, but I'll tell you I once handled the case of a close friend of mine, and treated him for a solid nine months without effect.

He was alone in a strange city...they drove home in a taxi through the drizzle, and she cuddled close to him, and her perfume, perhaps a trifle too strong, rose pleasantly to his nostrils, and he trembled. at the hotel they got out and he rang, his heart pounding uncomfortably, hoping madame herself would not open the door as she sometimes did. but soon there came the reassuring click and the door swung inward, and quietly they mounted the old creaking wooden steps. she could hear him breathing loudly, then suddenly he said, may i carry you? *mais certainement,* she said and yielded her sweet weight to his arms, and he mounted the stairs swiftly, easily, till they reached his landing. there he set her down. *sitôt?* she said. *enfin,* he breathed, and they entered the darkened rooms...

He looked at her and this time she turned and looked him squarely in the eyes, but gave no sign. She sighed then and turned away, allowing her hand to rest lightly on the cushion beside him. Her finger-nails were bright red, and as he looked up he was pleased to notice that though her jet hair was heavily pomaded, her neck was scrupulously clean. *Collegiate! collegiate! Yes-we-are-colleg-iate! W'at's a matta, big boy? 'fraid of me? Hell no! Then kiss me.*

The café crême arrived and he broke the croissant and dipped it in the glass. He took off his hat and placed it on the floor between his feet and loosened his muffler. She coughed, and startled, he looked at her. She crossed her legs and moved slightly away from him. Then he did a daring thing. Glancing around the café to make sure no one was looking at him for the moment, he took his pack of cigarettes and laid it ostentatiously in the middle of the table, hoping she would take one. Instead, she called the waiter and paid her check from the new purse. She looked at him, but feeling her eyes, he rested his head on the upholstered back-rest, gazed at the ceiling and ran his fingers through his hair. *You 'fraid of me? Kiss me! He kissed her, smelling the Lifebuoy odor through the heavy lavender scent. You're a nice*

kid, she said, only you're too young. You think so? he smiled quizzically, why not find out? Maybe I will—hey hey! collegiate!

People came in looking for tables and left with disappointed faces. The place was noisy and he wished he hadn't come. He remembered the last time, and the girl in the red patent-leather hat who grinned openly at him. He wrote a note to her: *Est-il permis de faire la connaissance?* and sent it by the waiter. As he left he paused at her table and she looked up with an ugly expression on her face. *"Fiche-moi donc la paix!"* she said. *"Pardon,"* he replied, lifted his hat and left.

A lanky painted girl came up and spoke to her, sat down beside her in the recently vacated place. She had teeth heavily inlaid with gold —enormous teeth and a hooked nose and small black eyes. She grinned and fished some cards out of her purse and showed them to the girl. Politely, he turned away, but he could not help noticing they were photographs—nude photographs tinted with water-colors, and on the bottom, in black, rococo type, there were the words: *Mlle. Yvonne, Specialtiés.* He felt ill. The other girl left, and then she put on her hat, coughed, looked at him hastily and arose. *I could do nothing with his case, but I referred him to a colleague of mine who cleared it up in three weeks! That's the way it goes.* He sighed. Every eye in the café turned to watch her go, her black coat pulled tightly about her hips, her green leather hat flashing in the light. She went down the stairs at the further end of the room. *Remember what happened last time.* Oh well. *Hey hey!*

He felt himself rising from the seat and noticed every eye upon him, every mouth smiling as he pulled on his hat. Casually, he threaded his way between the tables and descended the stairs . . . in the darkened room he felt for her, smelled the delicious odor of her perfume rising about her in the gloom, and shivered with anticipation. her voice was low and gentle in the room, and then she lit a cigarette and he saw the soft shadows of her face, the delicate contours of her bare shoulders. *chéri!* he said. . . .

She was standing downstairs in front of the *lavabo,* alone. Surprised, he turned into the room as though he had not noticed her, and she turned up the other flight of stairs into the New Dôme bar, a disgusted expression on her face. But as she seated herself on the high stool and ordered a drink she smiled, and when the barman said, *Ça va?"* she replied smiling, *"Très bien, merçi."*

He came out to find her gone. You know you cannot do a thing like this; you know you cannot do it. Remember what happened. He went up the staircase to the new bar, and across the throng of people, saw her smiling. As though she sensed his presence she turned and her white teeth flashed. She bowed. He went swiftly along the bar to her side and said, *"Bonsoir.* I was afraid to speak to you." She expressed surprise and he said, "Oh, you had such an air of the *femme fatale." "Mais, pas du tout!"* she said, and he was entranced by her voice. "Shall we go?" "As you please," she replied, turned from the bar and got down, her face expressionless. He spoke to the barman: "Has Mademoiselle paid her drink?" *"Non."* He paid, breaking the thousand franc note, and found she had preceded him to the street.

Outside, the drizzle had turned to sleet and a cold wind whipped up the boulevard from the Gare. The few passersby were hunched in their coats and hurried along; there was ice on the pavement, and when she said, *"Ça pique!"* he knew exactly what he had to do. He noticed with disappointment that her lower legs were bad, but decided they would be more than compensated for by the supremely lovely face and the supple torso. *"Écoutez!"* he said, "I have very little money." She shrugged. "I imagine you hear that often." "Often enough." *"Tenez,"* he said, "I am very lonely, and would be disposed to buy you dinner and any kind of wine you like, if you would be willing to talk to me for an hour." *Listen, sweetie, I wouldn't take a nickel from you if I wasn' so broke. After all, we're neighbors, living in the same house. I'll consider this a loan. Forget it. Gee you're a sweet kid!*

"Listen," she said, "I must speak *franchement* with you, *n'est-ce*

pas? I was very bored *au Dôme,* and if you will give me some money, I'll do anything you like, but if not, I will be obliged to remain *au Dôme,* as I have *rendez-vous* with a friend at eleven, who will give me some. But, pay attention, I would prefer to go with you if you will give me some money."

"I'm sorry," he replied, watching her shiver and cursing himself for his timidity. But now there was light appearing, as from the rapidly approaching end of a tunnel, and he hastened to wind up the affair. Thank God! he thought. Thank God! "I am sorry, but I have very little money. If you are hungry; if you are thirsty, I should be very happy to buy you a dinner at no matter what restaurant, and wine to your choice." Perhaps later. . .

"C'est dommage," she answered, "another time perhaps. But I shall be obliged to remain *au Dôme."* She turned, pulling her coat about her.

"Then you must remain," he said, and grasping her gloved hand, he bowed over it and kissed it, removing his hat.

"Bonsoir," she said.

He sighed and strode rapidly across the street, disappearing down Bréa into Vavin. . .

THE TEAMAN

by

Ira V. Morris

Of course I don't expect anyone to believe me when I tell them that a man I hardly know, whom I've met only twice, (once for five minutes and the other time for two), and whose name I can't possibly recall has spoiled my life. Well, I'm only stating facts: it's no exaggeration to say that "the teaman" ruined my career.

Our first and fatal meeting took place shortly after my wife and I had bought a country house; a nice little house, just far enough from town to avoid the suburbs yet near enough to permit of visits from one's friends. He was, if not our nearest neighbor, still very much our neighbor, seeing that from the roof of our own place one could spy the chimney of his above the treetops. He came to call in ultra-neighborly fashion five days after we had installed ourselves and while we were still busy unpacking our belongings, arranging books, and discovering new things about the house which would need to be repaired. That perhaps was the underlying cause of all the trouble. For my wife was too occupied to receive our guest: she left that doubtful pleasure, with her accustomed generosity, to me, contenting herself with calling out in a voice quite loud enough for him to hear as I went down the stairs,

"For Heaven's sake get the pest out of here as soon as possible! There are two hundred things to be done about the house."

If instead of, as usual, sliding responsibility on to a third party she had for once resolved to do something which she considered boring, the whole tragedy might well have been averted. Had she ever actually laid eyes on the cause of our unhappiness, I doubt very much if she would later have taken the attitude she did and perhaps we would at the present moment still be a happily married couple instead of two disillusioned, divorced people. It is easier, experience has taught me,

to kill a hundred men whom one has never seen, say by exploding a bomb within their midst, than to administer a kick to a mangy cur that one has chanced to meet. But be that as it may: I suppose it was fated that my wife should not receive him.

Well, it was eleven in the morning. That is an early hour to make a call, even in the country, and I remember that as I was opening the door to go into the sitting room, before as much as laying eyes upon the visitor, I had a presentiment that he was going to prove a bore. Who else, I would like to know, pays matinal calls on people whom he has never met and in whom he can have only the scant interest furnished by fortuitous proximity? Yes, who indeed?

My visitor's appearance did little or nothing to dissipate my suspicion. He wore unrimmed eyeglasses, which is in itself a bad sign, and a stiff collar, which at that hour and in such a place, is an even worse one. Moreover he was inflicted with a slight stutter or rather inarticulateness, coupled with an almost pathetic eagerness to oblige. I disliked the man at once and for some reason I was sorry for him.

"This is an awful hour to make a call," he began, and blushed scarlet as I shook hands with him. He was so flustered that he actually couldn't get on with what he had to say, but subsided, obeying my invitational gesture like a command, upon the sofa, from where he sat gazing up at me through his glasses with a childish and bewildered air.

"It was nice of you to call," I tried to help him out.

"Oh, thank you," he said gratefully, as he introduced a long, and it seemed, trembling forefinger between his collar and his neck, as if to create an opening down which a breath of air might flow to cool his worried body.

"I'm sorry that my wife couldn't come down to receive you," I went on, and lied: "She's not yet dressed."

"It's terribly early," said the visitor, smiling guiltily. "Why, it's not even noon."

For the moment I couldn't think of anything more to say, and we lapsed into a silence which I began to feel embarrassing. So, apparently, did he, for presently he broke it by uttering a remark which I am convinced he had intended not to make, and which in consequence was the one thing that forced itself into his mouth:

"I came this morning because I thought you might be out this afternoon."

"Oh yes." I smiled meaninglessly.

"You see," he elucidated, "you might be out making visits."

"That's true—so we might."

Again the angel of silence descended upon us, nor, I am sure, would there have been any use in offering a penny for his thoughts, for almost certainly they did not exist. But suddenly an extraordinary change came over him: he perked up his head, smiled eagerly, while an expression which could almost have been described as vivacious lit up the dull eyes behind the heavy glasses.

In a much louder tone than he had previously used, he burst out:

"Will you and your wife come to tea some day?"

"Why, of course," I replied, envisaging with a definite relief the end of our present conversation; which induced me generously to add, "any day you like."

"Well, what about Thursday next?"

"That would be very nice."

He at once began looking about for his bowler hat, which happened to be beside him on the sofa, and having located it, stuck it absent-mindedly upon his head, but remembering he was indoors, took it off again. He rose to go.

"I live almost next door," he began to mumble; and then stopped himself. "Why, you don't even know my name, do you?"

I had to admit that I did not.

"How stupid of me," he remarked. "I'm called ———." And he then pronounced a name which I almost instantly forgot and have since been totally unable to remember. I recall only that it was a very uninteresting, totally characterless appellation—not Smith, for that after all has a certain cachet through its very universality, but something even duller and more indefinite—something like Johnson or Brown. The name simply did not register in my brain, just as its owner failed to register: when he was gone the only thing I could remember about him was his stiff, white collar which was about half a size too small.

My wife greeted the news of our engagement with boredom but

without positive hostility. She was, in fact, too busy to be concentratedly hostile towards anything except a trunk that refused to open or a door that refused to remain shut, and this busyness, shared in by me as well, continued right up to Thursday, the day of our engagement with Mr. whatever his name was. After my announcement that we had been asked to tea and a description in ten words of our would-be host, we had not once mentioned him, so perhaps it is not altogether surprising that we both of us forgot completely about the rendez-vous and that Thursday afternoon found us not taking tea but carrying piles of books from the attic into the library and setting them up with due regard to the alphabetical sequence of their authors names. Towards six o'clock the telephone gave a ring.

"I wonder who that can be," remarked my wife, pausing in the arrangement of the B section to listen to our new maid's voice on our end of the wire. "It must be someone calling us from town."

"Yes," I said, "we don't know anyone hereabouts."

A moment later the maid came into the library.

"The gentleman who asked you to tea today wants to know if you're going to come."

My wife and I gazed at each other from our respective ladders and slowly the horrible realization dawned upon us.

"My God!" exclaimed my wife.

"It was today!" I murmured weakly.

"What should I tell him?" demanded the maid unrelentingly. "He's waiting for an answer."

My wife lowered her voice to an almost inaudible whisper, though the telephone was at the other end of the hallway and a closed door intervened.

"Tell him," she said, "that we were called suddenly to town this morning and that we tried to get him on the 'phone before we left. Tell him that his line was busy. Tell him," she added in desperation, "anything you like."

"Oh we can't do that!" I almost fell down the step ladder in my excitement. "We simply can't do that. Why we've had the engagement almost a week. I've never heard of anything so rude in all my life."

"Then, what do you suggest?" she asked. "We've got to tell him

something. We can't keep him waiting all afternoon."

"Well, why don't we go? It's only six o'clock. It's not too late."

"Go!" My wife ridiculed the idea. "Of course we can't go. It'd take me an hour to make myself presentable. Anyway, why should we bore ourselves to death by going there when we can have a marvellous time at home? We don't even know his name. What was the gentleman's name?" she asked the maid.

"The gentleman didn't give his name."

"Well, tell him that we've gone to town."

"Don't do anything of the kind!" I waved a book wildly in the air in my effort to detain the maid. "Tell him we'll be there in half an hour."

"But I refuse to go," declared my wife emphatically. "You can go there by yourself."

That gave me pause. It was one thing to beard the bore in his den, mentally and morally supported by the presence of a sympathetic third party; quite another to repeat the painful tête-à-tête of the preceding week. I reflected on the situation for a moment and, as it was impossible to reflect much longer, I determined on a compromise.

"I'll 'phone him in a few days and ask him to come here."

"Yes, yes—anything you like," she sighed wearily. "Only let's not talk about him now."

I admit that once it was decided that we were not to go to tea a definite feeling of relief took possession of me, but that did not prevent me from regretting the rudeness of which we had been guilty, especially when the maid remarked later in the evening that "the gentleman didn't understand why we hadn't been able to reach him on the telephone; he was in all morning and his 'phone had not once been in use. He would not fail to complain about the service." I hate to be rude to people, particularly if they have tried to be nice to me, and I determined that we must make up for our slight as soon as possible.

The very next morning at breakfast, therefore, I brought the subject up.

"What day should we ask him to come to tea?"

"Ask who?" queried my wife, biting into a juicy pear with her

small white teeth. (She has a marvellous appetite for breakfast and in fact for other meals and for life in general.) "Who are we going to ask for tea?"

"Why, our neighbor—the fellow who asked us yesterday. Lord knows what he's called."

"Oh are you back at that again?" she seemed slightly amused. "Why, I thought we'd settled him for good and all."

"Don't you remember that we were going to ask him here?"

"Were we? Why should we ask him here? We don't even know what his name is yet."

"Because it's the thing to do," I tried to point out. "He was nice enough to call on us and to ask us to tea, which we first accepted and then rudely forgot about. The most polite thing now is to invite him here."

"And the most boring," said my wife. "How can you want to spend a marvellous afternoon sipping tea with some idiot whose name you can't even remember? The only thing you know about him is that he asks people to tea the first time that he sees them."

"We might call him 'the teaman'," I suggested, amused despite myself.

"Well, I'm not interested in your teaman—let's forget about him. Aren't you happy to be here alone with me?"

"Of course I am. I only want to be polite."

"I know you do," replied my wife. "Politeness has become a sort of mania with you—I don't think you could be rude to the very devil if he came to call on you." She leaned over the breakfast table and kissed me on the mouth.

That effectively silenced me for the time being and I decided that I had better let the subject rest for a few days anyway. After all, what was I to the teaman or the teaman to me? I doubted if I'd even recognize him if I met him on the street. And yet the thought that I'd really been unbearably and unforgiveably rude continued to harass me. If I have any principle in life it's always to do the correct thing and there was no doubt whatsoever that this time I'd failed to do it. It was impossible to let the situation rest where it was—that was certain—and yet I hated to annoy my wife by reopening it. I deter-

mined to use all my tact in an effort to get it finally adjusted.

One afternoon, about a fortnight after the teaman's visit, when the rain was pouring down in streaks and the sky gave little promise of improvement in the weather, I exclaimed casually:

"This is just the sort of day when everybody stays indoors."

"Yes," said my wife, putting down the book that she was reading, and gazing out of the window. "It's nice at home."

"I wonder what the teaman's doing," I remarked with a vague little laugh.

"Who knows? Probably drinking tea."

"You don't think," I maintained my casual and disinterested tone, "you don't think that this would be just the afternoon to pay our call? We'd be sure to find him in," I hurried on, largely in order to prevent her from interrupting, "and we need only stay a few minutes and get the whole matter off our minds for good and all."

"But nothing's on my mind," replied my wife, looking at me with astonishment. "Really, you are a funny person. Haven't you forgotten about him yet?"

"No, I certainly haven't," I declared with somewhat more heat. "You know that we can't let the thing slide much longer—we've been bad enough about it as it is. What do you suppose he thinks of us by now?"

"I don't care in the slightest what he thinks. Life's too short to worry about what people whom one's never seen are thinking of one."

"Perhaps it is—if you happen to be totally lacking in a sense of responsibility. I only know that I feel—" I searched about for the proper word. "I feel like a perfect cad."

My wife began to laugh, but then she looked at my earnest, worried face, and checked herself. She understood at last that I really did take the matter seriously.

"If you feel like that," she said, "why on earth don't you go alone? Why do you want to drag me with you?"

"Why?" I demanded rhetorically. "Why? Don't you understand that it's a hundred times worse now if I go alone than if we don't go at all? It would simply mean that you don't want to meet him and that I'm paying the call as a simple duty."

"But aren't you?"

"Of course I am, but I happen to have enough common decency not to want to tell him so. I don't understand you—that's a fact."

I was genuinely angry now and I realized that if I did not take care there was going to be a quarrel. What a trivial subject for two people who love each other to quarrel about, when they'd been married half a dozen years and had always understood each other so perfectly that they didn't even have to discuss matters! With an effort I controlled myself and sat down beside her on the sofa.

"Darling, excuse me," I exclaimed, kissing her tenderly behind the ear. "Let's not talk about it any more. Of course if you don't want to see the teaman you don't have to. Damn the teaman anyway!"

But my capitulation provoked hers as well.

"No, no," she insisted, "now we're going to go. Let's go at once. It's a wonderful afternoon to pay a call. Come on, darling!"

"I wouldn't hear of it. You'll have to go alone if you want to go —I won't go with you."

Finally it was decided that we were not to go that day but that we should pay our call next week, any day I wished, and that in the meanwhile the subject of the teaman would not be mentioned in our house.

But next week came and with it lovely weather, and I hardly dared remind my wife of her part of the agreement. She had, I realized, again forgotten the proposed visit and she savored the long sunny afternoons far too much to allow one of them to be broken into. I kept putting off the difficult moment from day to day, I let the week slip by, and when I finally gathered courage enough to speak, it seemed that it was with difficulty that she recalled the very existence of the teaman.

"Good Heavens, you're not still thinking about that call?"

"You said you'd go," I reminded her obdurately.

"Well, all right, I'll go some day—but not today. I simply don't feel strong enough to go today."

Gradually the teaman became an obsession with me. I knew that it was ridiculous to let such a matter disturb my peace of mind, and yet it did; hardly a day passed in which I did not think of it and when

it did not seem to me that now finally I must resolve a situation which had long since become intolerable.

The thing began to interfere with my work. I am an author and was at that time engaged on a serious long novel. Often as I sat at my writing table, lost in the imaginary world which I was projecting onto paper, the thought of the teaman would flit across my mind. I pictured him alone in his dark cold house, waiting, still waiting for his bell to ring to announce the call which had been so long delayed; before him on a tea table were cups and saucers, cakes and toast, which he gazed at without sampling, while with one finger introduced behind his small stiff collar he gently rubbed his neck. Sometimes beside him I could see a gaunt, worried woman—the teaman's wife—brooding along with her husband over the insult which had been inflicted on them. The phone bell tinkles and simultaneously they rush over to the instrument. No, it is only the local butcher who wants to know if pork chops could take the place of mutton. Sadly they resume their places at the table.

Again and again I broached the subject to my wife, but each time she had some reason, some excuse why just that day we should not make our call. At first she used to laugh at me, and indeed I was forced to laugh at myself, for I had to admit that the whole thing was in the last analysis absurd. When she caught me lost in thought or when absentmindedly I failed to answer her when she spoke to me, she used to say, "I know what you're thinking of—the teaman."

But after a month or two my insistence began to exasperate her. Finally she admitted that she not only had no intention of making the call, but had never had one, and when I reminded her of her promise she declared that I must be mistaken. In the matter of the teaman I began to see not only an example of self-willed obstinacy but a demonstration of her whole irresponsible and pleasureloving attitude towards life. I understood for the first time that we looked at things from different angles and that a person whose actions are based on principle can never mate happily with a hedonist preoccupied with taking from life the easy things it has to offer.

From that time things were heading towards a crisis. I do not say the teaman was the cause of our divorce, but he was surely the

most important contributory factor, and I do sincerely think that had it not been for him we might have lived together many years more before discovering our fundamental incompatability. What is certain is that when we separated after our final quarrel, never to meet again except in the divorce court, my wife threw after me the parting taunt:

"Now you can take tea with anyone you like!"

I have just sold my country house. Since my divorce my writing has been steadily less successful and frequently I am no longer able to sell what I have written. It seems to me that my wife's influence gave my work a human note it now has lost and that the only persons who still appreciate what I produce are those few who understand a pure and flawless style, and realize that I write novels as they should be written.

A week ago I saw the teaman for the second time. He was standing on the street corner waiting for a bus, and my supposition was correct: I never would have recognized him had he not spoken to me first.

"How do you do?" he greeted me. "I'm so sorry that you couldn't come to tea that day."

He was still as vague and embarrassed as he had been six years before, and I felt bored almost before I had gotten over my shock at seeing him. I had a momentary inclination to tell him what frightful consequences his visit of that day had had, and I was actually opening my mouth to speak when I thought better of it; one look at those dull, unsoulful eyes, that stiff, ill-fitting collar, convinced me that he would not understand. But suddenly, as on the previous occasion, a transformation seemed to take place in him: his eyes brightened, he actually appeared to grow a trifle taller, and clearing his throat he pronounced in a loud and cadent voice:

"Won't you and your wife come to tea some day?"

"Why, of course," I replied, and, amazed at the repetitive process of life, added, "any day you like."

"What about Thursday?"

"That would be very nice."

He at once began looking about for his bus, which happened to

be almost bearing down upon him, and having located it, jumped hastily on the back platform.

"After all, I live in practically the next house to you," he began to mumble, and then he stopped himself. "But perhaps you don't even know my name."

I had to admit that I did not.

"How stupid of me," he remarked. "I'm called——".

But the bus had carried him out of hearing: the teaman had disappeared into my past.

A LETTER

by

Noah Fabricant

THE letter from Ruth came a few minutes ago. In the first mail out of the West.

It begins: Hell, no. I have written nothing. I write nothing. Not even letters. Too many people talk too long. For months now I have searched for quiet in the hills—still places where not even the wind would rustle the leaves. There are none. Once I found a place. It was cool. It was quiet. Forgotten. I stayed long. Five hours. People came along with lunch baskets and kids. They tore down the trees. The kids fell into the stream. And I left. There are no quiet places...

I met Ruth a year ago. In Vienna.

Norah said David's sister is coming. I had never seen her. And David hadn't seen her in years.

One night Ruth was there. In the house Norah and David lived in. Up on Wipplingerstrasse. Ruth wore a pale pink thing. Its paleness sticks in my mind.

Now that I think of it maybe her pink dress is symbolic. I don't know. Ruth was like many another American girl. Rather pretty. A little bewildered by the strangeness of Europe.

I felt like a native along side her. In five months I was an *Ausländer* turned into a *Küss die Hand* gent.

That pale pink dress was Ruth. I'm sure of it now. Her talk was first that way, pale and pink. We spoke of things that people speak about in America. The movies and the depression and will beer come back soon, do you think? And of her ocean crossing and there were people who were sick.

And after a while there wasn't much to talk about.

When we four took walks through the Wiener Wald Ruth listened

and walked along. One Saturday we went out of Vienna to a small little pool sleeping under a dark green mountain. The water was drunk with coolness. We played water ball and laughed and swam. It all felt good.

Then Ruth was gone. Far away it seemed.

David laughed and said she was probably behind the clump of bushes over there out of the sun. But Norah was uneasy and so we looked.

Her uneasiness grew. Ruth was gone.

The pool wasn't very deep. But deep enough for drowning. And the thought crept around in our minds.

We didn't see the clouds overhead. It was getting dark fast and then the storm broke. We ran for the tiny hut just beyond the bend.

There was Ruth. Wet and flushed. From a dash along the knee of the mountain.

Her letter charts despair.

This is a hell of a world. All day long I roam around among the dead and dying. In the morning I view the dropsical patients and in the afternoon I console the ones in casts and by night I hate them all. I can get nothing done. They eat my mind. Sometimes I wish I were back in Vienna. Then again I regret having gone because I regret having come back and if I had never gone I would never have come back. I haven't written to David and Norah for weeks. They no longer exist. They have become small through distance. I cannot recall their faces...

Sometimes friendships start off on the wrong foot. Something is said or done. And ice floats into relationships.

I give it significance now. It didn't seem significant then. And Ruth joked about it when we became close friends that Fall. But then it was bewildering. Her distance to me.

In August Norah couldn't get away from Vienna for a holiday. David and Ruth and I met in Paris. We stayed in different hotels and had our meals and ran about the city together.

Food in Paris took us everywhere. We hunted it. We were starved for tasty cooking.

At first Ruth joined us regularly. Then she dropped out. A day would go by and she might or might not meet us.

It got so that David resented it. Then he grew quite angry. A brother's anger. There was nothing we could do about it and so we let her alone.

Her letter concludes: I still continue to receive letters about the story. Why, I do not know. And the article continues to come back. Three times now it has gone out and three times returned. I know of no place to send it... I have no time. The days are short. Nothing gets done. And I do not care. Nothing matters. I shall probably never write anything now.

Suddenly, in the Fall, there was warmth between us. I can't explain why or how it started. Probably for no good reason at all. But that the autumn brought understanding and rain and brown red leaves.

Ruth spoke. Unlike the girl I had known. Now it was wisely and gayly. Thoughts flying like bluewhite will-o'-the-wisps. She was entirely new.

I liked her. And she liked me. A low deep sweetness that came on in waves of autumn freshness.

Her old character gone, she wrote. Simply and beautifully. Her first story I envied. I knew I could never do quite as well.

That was several weeks before I sailed for home. Things went rapidly then. Too rapidly. I was at the Nordbahnhof. She was seeing me off, saying goodbye. Goodbyes linger painfully and then they are gone.

She, too, was sailing soon. And her goodbyes would linger painfully and then be gone.

I ask myself why I say all this. Why anyone uses his memory as a magic-lantern. Or as a whip. Or a dulling balsam.

The letter says what I have tried to say before to others. Who listened quietly and sympathetically. And shook their heads. Sympathetically. But I knew they didn't know. And couldn't know. And so long ago I have stopped talking about Europe. To others. And what it means to come home again too soon. And coil and twist and squirm. And wonder.

There is no nostalgia.

There is no running away again.

There is not even a retreat.

There is only wonder. And days ahead. Spinning and twisting and whirling into longer days ahead.

WITH THE FOG

by

Kathleen Salisbury

THE service trees were blowing white over the mountain sides. Against the grayness of the winter woods, their early April flowering stood out pure and fresh in the spring sunlight. Popular buds were beginning to swell, and dogwoods were giving earnest of future glory. The air smelled warm, and clean, and the ground felt live and eager. Violets were pushing through, arbutus was almost pink, and bees and yellow-jackets flashed back and forth, droning loudly. Rising far across the valley below, the Blue Ridge, clear and harsh across the sky, ended the known world of the average Brushy Mountain family.

A pair of mourning doves, tail feathers fanwise, fluttered down in the clearing before the tenant house where Edgar Gentle and his family lived. It was strangely still. Only the thick smoke curling up from the rough pointed chimney indicated any life within the slab-sided cabin, and the doves, as they waddled around, pecking hopefully at the stony soil, were as unaware of Jettie Gentle and her cares as she of them.

Jettie Gentle was thirteen, a pale little bit of a thing, with great blue eyes, and a shock of rough black hair. Too young and tender for the hard unending toil of a mountain woman, too frail and small for the tasks already bending her childish shoulders.

"Jettie," a low, rather pleasant voice spoke a little breathlessly. "Jettie, better be sending up the mountain for old Miss Tevie soon now. Where's your pappy and the boys?"

"Plowing up the bottom, all but Rufe—"

Over in the rickety wooden bed, which occupied nearly a quarter of the low, roughly sealed cabin room, Edgar Gentle's old woman, Jettie's mammy, pulled herself up. She was barely forty, but work

in the fields, and ten living children had pinched and aged her sorely. But her eyes, unfaded, and bluer even than Jettie's own, were still brilliant and youthful in the withered setting of her face.

"Where's Rufe at?" demanded Medey Gentle. "Where's he at, you Jettie?"

Jettie backed off defensively. Mammy had a sting in her tongue as sharp as the feel of a hickory switch.

"I forget, Mammy. Around somewhere. Helping spray most likely, up at the Preacher's Place." Jettie turned to the fire. It would never do to let Mammy know that Rufe had drawn his time from the Preacher, and gone off with a gang of boys loafering to Hunting Creek. And she had almost told. With her tongue between her teeth, she picked up the least baby—Fraily, his name was—from the cold floor where he was sitting, staring impassively at the fire, and jumped him a little. If Mammy knew that Rufe, her eldest born, was off drinking with those low-down Hunting Creek folks, she'd get off her death bed to hound him home—and Jettie had promised to keep Mammy down.

Medey Gentle sank back on her stale hot bed, lay almost motionless, barely groaning from time to time. Her blue eyes stared at the girl and the baby. Only her flickering fingers as she smoothed the Rose of Sharon spread she saved for bornings, and her lips, as she chewed on a twig of black gum, kept busy.

Jettie stopped to fix another log in the fireplace, brushed up the hot ashes over a dish of corn pone, and swung the kettle of water over the flames.

"Holler to one of the boys to go fetch Miss Tevie. And when she comes, Jettie, you go on down, and help your pappy till Miss Tevie calls you. And don't let your pappy go off a-drinking. Mind, Jettie." The voice lost its pleasant warmth suddenly. "Get along, Jettie. Put the baby up here by me."

"Let me tote Fraily along with me, Mammy," begged Jettie in a sudden agony. "I'll wrop him up a-plenty."

"Git along, Jettie. I done told you, Jettie. He'd catch his never-get-overs in this blowing weather. Git." Mammy Gentle's voice rose in a scream. Fraily, his thin little face puckered, began to whimper.

He was just by his first year.

Before Jettie had time either to soothe the baby, or argue, a tiny, bent woman, carrying an overflowing paper poke, fumbled her way in through the always open doorway.

"Howdy, Medey. I guessed you'd be wanting of me, and Roxie Chatham does sure, so I followed down the branch from up yonder, 'stid o' waitin' to hear."

Old Miss Tevepaugh was eighty and upwards, and had birthed all the young uns on the mountain, as well as the most part of their mammies and pappies. Fair weather and foul, Miss Tevie kept busy. "Lord's Work" she called it, and through the coves and the hollers, along the creeks and the branches, wherever a mountain family had raised a roof, Miss Tevie was known and honored.

"You, Jettie," she ordered in her thin cracked voice, "git water b'ilin', and scorch me some clean rags. And take this here young un off'n the bed. Tain't no time since I was here, Medey. Right peart little feller, he is, too. What you havin' for me this time, Medey?"

All the time old Miss Tevie's tongue was clacking, she was bustling about, arranging things to suit herself.

"You, Jettie, take this young un, and go 'long now. I'll holler when I need ye."

Jettie, only to glad to disregard her mammy's orders, and obey Miss Tevie whose word was always law, snatched up the baby, and bundled him so securely in a big black shawl, that he was to all intents and purposes completely protected from the air and sunlight.

"You said I could name hit, Mammy," urged Jettie, gingerly approaching the bedside. Poor Mammy, she was surely took worse each time, though of course, Jettie couldn't remember any of the bornings but Kenor, who was five, and Fraily. And the twins, betwixt Kenor and Fraily, little girls, hardly born before they died.

Mighty funny about children, Jettie thought, as she lugged Fraily down the steep little path that plunged to the bottom. You don't have enough food for the children you have, so you make more crops, and then you got to have more children—boys, if so be—to work them. Oh, yes, Jettie knew how endless was the more children, more crops, more children business.

Down in the bottom it was warm, and sunny, and Jettie really considered taking Fraily out of his bundle.

"Kenor," she called. "Kenor."

Kenor, who in name and appearance, might have been either boy or girl, was little girl. She had passed far beyond the bundling stage. Kenor was already barefoot, and through the holes in her cut-down apron it was easy to see that underwear was an inessential. Her rough short hair would have curled a bit, with any encouragement, in a really girlish fashion but there was little enough time and opportunity for keeping Kenor covered or clean, let alone frilled up, Jettie thought, as Kenor, barefooted, came leaping carelessly over brambles and boulders alike.

"Watch Fraily while I go see Pappy," said Jettie.

Kenor nodded. Kenor was almost as inarticulate as Fraily. Mountain children are slow to talk, besides being shy.

Pappy and Theed, who at sixteen, was next above Jettie, and Cic'ro, who at eleven, was next below her, were stacking up the fall-stripped fodder. Alverda, who looked exactly like Kenor, except a size larger at nine, was helping tie.

"Miss Tevie come down Cub Creek?" asked Edgar Gentle calmly.

"No, down the Wildcat," said Jettie. "And did Rufe come back? He better be here afore Miss Tevie's through, or Mammy will be out and after him."

Edgar Gentle was silent. Inwardly he yearned to do just what Rufe was doing. Get a jug of corn licker, or even sweet mash, and enjoy hisself. Forget about shares to the Preacher, and a new mouth to feed. And just be drunk. Sunday drunk. Meetin' for women folks on Sunday, and stillin' for men folks. Spiritual comfort for women folks, drink for men folks.

Jettie knew the signs. Saturday nights and bornings always made Pappy restless and yearning.

"Pappy," said Jettie. "Pappy, will hit be raining this evening?" If she could only get Pappy started on studying out the weather, he might stand around long enough so that Miss Tevie would call, and then he couldn't get to go off anywhere.

"I told you, Jettie. I done told you April borrowed ten days

from March. Wind's a-coming powerful, and shouldn't wonder to see fog afore wind."

Edgar Gentle was a tall, mild-looking man, stout and husky for all his name and bearing, and like all the mountain men of family, hard-working on week-days, and hard drinking over Sundays.

He stood now, lazily at ease, sniffing the wind. Edgar Gentle had worked hard all his life, but the years had not told so harsh a tale, and his lean muscularity showed none of the wrack that Medey's maternity-worn frame exhibited. Fathering a family was plumb easy, Jetty thought as she looked at her pappy. It was easier to be a boy, Jettie was sure. Look at Rufe, and Theed, and Cic'ro, Click, and even little Fraily. Look at Mayhew, Jettie's oldest sister, just nineteen, and already with three young uns. Mayhew had been right pretty before she was married, and before babies and crop-tending had aged and withered her. Look at Angie, just sixteen, and almost in trouble all the time.

"Look yonder, Jettie. Fog's a-droppin' now. Stack up, you Theed, and Cic'ro. Git that under cover afore hit's damped off again." Pappy himself set to work with a sudden burst of zeal. "Hit'll be mighty thick afore Angie and Click gits home."

Angie, who was sixteen, and Click, who was seven, both went down mountain to the lower school which kept longer than the Crest school where all the rest of the young Gentles went. The Crest school ran from November to March, and the lower school usually a week or two more. Crops had to be tended to, and young uns were cheap hands. And schoolin' wasn't much account nohow. However, Angie and Click said they liked the teaching down at the lower school, and so day after day they walked the six miles down and back quite faithfully. People did say Angie liked the teacher better than common. She'd been highest in the fifth grade for three years now—and that meant the biggest, not the smartest. Click went along because he was Angie's pet. Angie'd raised Click, the same as Jettie was raising Fraily.

Way off to the East, Jettie could see cottony wisps of cloud, not quite in the sky, and yet not low enough for ground mist. Just hanging in mid-air. And somehow the April sun was losing its warmth. North, the Blue Ridge was slowly hazing over.

"Best wrop Fraily up again," said Jettie. "Will there be rain, Pappy?"

But Pappy was really working. For a time at least, Pappy had forgotten the borning, and Rufe's flight.

Jettie went back to Fraily and Kenor, playing solemnly with a handful of dogwood berries, some galax leaves, and a burnished snail shell. Alverda, tieing up bundles awkwardly, whispered as Jettie went by. Alverda didn't know the rights of new babies yet.

"Miss Tevie bring hit with her, Jet?" Alverda had learned that what Rufe said wasn't so—'Mammy finds 'em under cabbage leaves'—but in spite of plenty of calves, and unending families of kittens, Alverda was still a little questioning.

"Jettie, Jettie." High and shrill, Miss Tevie's voice rang out.

"I'm a-coming," shouted Jettie, her pale face suddenly flushed. She snatched the reluctant Fraily, almost stumbling over Kenor, and raced up the path to the cabin.

"Jettie, has your pappy a drop o' whiskey about? Your mammy needs some, and needs it real bad. Ef you kin find it, I druther you did than rouse up your pappy."

Old Miss Tevie turned slightly from the bedside where she was wiping up not one baby but two.

Jettie put Fraily down before the fire where he sat as impassively as before, staring into the flames.

"Reckon I can find some, Miss Tevie," she said, dragging a chair over to the cupboard that filled nearly one wall of the cabin. "Is she bad?" Jettie's voice hardly changed its even tone. Mountain children did not cry, did not laugh easily.

"A hurtin' in her side," said old Miss Tevie, wrapping up the second of the red mites in a swaddling of blankets.

"These yere are sure man size babies, Jettie. Hev ye two namin's ready? Man namin's?"

Jettie, an old quart jar in her hand, came over to Miss Tevie.

"Peach brandy, 'tis," she said. "I been hidin' it for sickness."

She peered at the babies, whose squinty little faces were hardly visible in the dusk of the room. "I like Fraily better," she said. "Whar'll we put 'em, Miss Tevie?"

Medey Gentle opened her eyes, moved slightly.

"Whar but with me, Jettie Gentle? I never let a young un sleep its first year anywhere but on my arm, and I hev two arms for two young uns. Hand 'em here, Miss Tevie."

"Take this first, Medey. It'll cure your hurtin', and help you strengthen quicker." Miss Tevie licked her testing finger meditatively.

"Now open your mouth, Medey. Open your mouth."

Medey Gentle blinked and swallowed. Her eyes that had been dull and sleepy sparkled slightly.

"Your pappy, what is he at, Jettie?"

"Gettin' in fodder afore fog, Mammy," said Jettie. "And the boys."

Medey Gentle pulled the two babies, still whimpering in their tiny voices, up to her:

"Useter get right up and cook a meal for you, didn't I, Miss Tevie? I'm getting pure and puny, seems like. Angie'll be home afore long, and she'll get up some dinner."

Jettie glanced out the open doorway. Slowly, steadily, the fog was rolling in. Pretty soon the Preacher's orchard would be swallowed up, and before long, the corn crib at the end of the clearing, and the mule stalls would be covered over.

"Won't wait for a meal, Medey. I better get along to Roxie Chatham's whilst I can. Jettie can see to you, till Angie comes. And maybe better than Angie, from all talk has about Angie," she added, just a little maliciously.

Angie was prettier even than Mayhew had been. Angie and Rufe and Mayhew all took after the Gentle generations—tall, and colorful. Medey had given her blue eyes to Jettie, and Click, and Fraily, but Kenor, and Alverda, and Cic'ro, and Theed were all plain to ugly like Medey's generation, the Joinses. Angie was pretty, and so people talked more.

Jettie knew people were saying Angie Gentle'd do better to marry in the Bumgarners than keep her eyes on the Teacher down to the Lower School. Folks knew how Angie'd acted Protracted Meeting week last Augu- up to the New Hope church. Angie'd spent a sight more time out under the trees than getting spiritual grace—and Angie

of all the Gentles should have been right up front on the Mourners' Bench.

"Well, Medey, next year again about this time?" Miss Tevie laughed, poked at Fraily with her soft slippered toe as she started for the door. "Send word to the Chathams if you need me," and Miss Tevie disappeared in the fog.

The old dominicker crowed shrilly. In the stall, Kate and Dock, the mules, whinnied wildly. The peaceful silence of the early morning had gone. With the coming of the fog, thick and troubled as it rose and fell, beating up against the cabin only to fade away, there was a general disquiet.

"Angie'll not be liking it," said Jettie softly, more to herself than to her Mammy, who, with a baby in each arm, was lying almost relaxed in the old wooden bed.

JOURNEY BACK

by

L. A. Pavey

He had suggested the expedition lightheartedly, really thinking it would be fun. Or rather, he realized now, he had not thought seriously, he had relied rather on the impression that was bound to be made on his family by the mere comparison between their present well-being and his early poverty. Now that he had brought them to that region of his boyhood and his youth, there began to beat at him inexorably—he could not fend it away—the knowledge that one has to think and plan ahead very, very carefully, both for one's family and for oneself. Mere vague anticipations were so easily upset by the actual event. The imagination which had stood him in such good stead in business deals when he was moving in the dark was apt to play him false in these little personal affairs. He had discovered that before. The fact was that where the issue seemed unimportant financially, he decided or he vetoed quite recklessly. Again and again he had been through that disillusioning experience—of running his hard head against a whole world of other values which grew gradually from the imperceptible into oppositions that eventually triumphed by the sheer suffocation of his resistance, reducing all his successful practical personality to a flattered negation.

The worst of it was, pride, as now, had never let him withdraw, as he might otherwise have done, early and in good order. Here he was dumped at the railway station that served that dingy edge of suburbia, and here with him was his wife Clare, and his children Richard, aged sixteen, and Joy, aged twelve. They were to perceive, as they did at once, the differences between the regions in which their town flat and their country house were placed, and the district in which he himself had lived with his parents through so many years of poverty. Those comparisons indeed were inescapable, even if they did no more

than question him and comment on them by side reference or by sudden ejaculation. Why had he imagined himself carrying off the expedition jauntily? He could not understand. He found in himself instead a growing watchfulness, as though those observable physical differences of district were not the most important. He had even the almost unplaceable feeling, faint yet definitely there, curiously persistent yet quite unseizable, that he was the observed as well as the observer. From the point of view, not that he had come back rich, but that he, a normal specimen of that district's life, had forsaken it and was now no more than a disembodied ghost.

The children were nearly bowled over by the impetuous rush of a brother and sister, combined age ten, who darted along the pavement to the dire jeopardy of a milk jug. They looked at him shyly, not wanting to make any comment of which he would not approve. He thought, but at the last moment found that he could not say, "I used to do that!"

"Richard, dear," said his wife, stepping aside to avoid the hurried passage from a gateway of a cats' meat man, with an armful of repulsive looking horse flesh. "I had no idea it was quite so terrible!"

And he, remembering that this high road was once so full of romance and of the possibilities of spending odd halfpence, yet replied cravenly, apologetically, "Of course, it used to be rather different, my dear, in those days."

"Still," said his wife with distaste, "it couldn't have been..." she left it unfinished, with a slight shrug. No, he thought, with a sudden hardening of feeling amounting almost to animosity, that was at a time when you knew only parklands in Sussex, and school on the South coast and in Paris.

"But you will let us see your house, Richard, won't you?" she asked. "We must see that!"

He led them down a side road, with continual detours from the pavement in order that the lawful progress of prams might not be impeded, or that they might not embarrass the free flow of gossip of groups of fat women, or the play of children hopping with shrill cries from one chalked square to another. They were regarded with the interest due to fauna of unknown origin and domicile.

"That's the house," he mumbled at length, "number seventeen, over the way." He would not stop. He nodded at it, then walked on, leaving them to note with horror the dirty little exterior, the lack of paint on the door and the woodwork of the two little windows, the faded curtains and the hopeless aspidistra.

"Well," he thought, desperately, "how can one tell them that to a small boy it was home, a base for the conquest of the world and all its glories? How would they understand, with their different lives, that when I had nothing, there was all the world to win?"

Yes, this visit was hopeless! He was as depressed as the others. He merely grunted, rather scornfully, at the exclamation of his wife, feeling still at the end of the street the gaze of those women boring through her back. "Richard, I never knew! How could you bear it?"

And it had made the young Richard think. "By Jove, pater, that's something to get out of," he said, with conviction.

"I wonder if you'd have pulled out," thought his father, but he did not say so. He was weary.

Then suddenly, as they turned into the road to the station it was as though the face of that one little girl flamed at him from the group that was playing Looby Loo on the path in front of him. He was, on the instant, smitten to the heart. It was her face, exactly, the face of that first young love of his who in the days now dead, had walked these streets with him in bliss. Her poor thin dress was stained and tattered; in her eyes and her eager lovely face was the light of childhood joy. "Her child," he thought, incredulous, "it must be her child!" And now at last his life fell away from him and he saw clear back to the days when, ardent-eyed, this future that now burdened him was before him. He could have groaned. For Heaven and earth had awaited him, but he had only found the earth...

TWELVE HOURS OF LIFE

by

Pietro Solari

She nervously ran her hand over the back of her head, until she succeeded in disengaging the two or three blades of dried grass that had caught in her hair as she had lain squirming on the ground. Then, she put up her hair with her pocket-comb, looked into her pocket-mirror, and brought down her skirt, which was too short, over her bony knees, and circled her knees with her arms. She had the shiny face of a predatory monkey, hiding away with its booty.

The lad, as he looked at her, reflected that, at thirteen, woman is an ugly, angular creature, with knotted joints. One day, those joints would suddenly unknot, as though someone had oiled them; and he kept on looking at her, as though expecting such a metamorphosis to occur at any moment.

They had as yet no very clear idea of what they had done, or what the consequences might be.

The lad scratched his left elbow, upon which—being inexperienced in gallantry—he had rested too heavily in order not to throw his weight upon her. The grass had left a green stain upon his sleeve.

The young girl turned, with a quick and graceless movement, and showed him her back in some alarm, running her hand over it as she did so.

"I hope I'm not stained, anyway!"

This appeared to be the most serious thing she had to worry about. Reassured, she burst out laughing and drew him to her, forcing him first to knees and then to a place at her side. Then she embraced him and kissed him on the mouth, as a woman kisses a man, knowing very well how a man should be kissed.

"Silly! And to think that you're fifteen!"

He had a sensation on the top of his head that reminded him of

the barber's shop. He strove in vain to think over again, in an orderly and logical fashion, what had taken place.

Their thoughts were wandering now, and were no longer following the same path. The young girl was looking about her, as though seeking assurance that they were alone. There was no one about, she could be sure of that. They were on the edge of a slope that ran down under a thicket of oaks. Had they wanted to, they might have found a hiding-place in the ditch, which was deep and dry, but they had not thought of it. Farther on, there was a bramble thicket that ran down to a bit of crumbling mould under a number of acacias, and farther yet were the fields, but there was no one there, either. The immobility of the noon-hour held them, under a cloudless expanse blinding as a white flag hung out to dry.

A rustling in the bush gave them a sudden start; they looked at each other and held their breath, and did not laugh until they had seen a big green lizard crawling into a forest of brambles. They were afraid, and they were ashamed of the fact. This place was like too big a room in which a pair of children had been left to play. They needed courage to enable them to overcome their dread of this boundless noonday solitude.

"Look at that mug. Does it look like me?"

The girl, with an uneasy little laugh, pointed to a figure that she had modeled out of the clay a moment before.

"Go ahead and finish it."

She looked at it, and shook her head. The lad looked also, with the air of one who is making a discovery. Was it really she who had made that figure? When? He no longer had any but the most confused notion of time. What time could it be, anyway?

"It's ugly. You go ahead and finish it. Throw away your cigarette."

It was the last one he had. He looked for a stone to lay it down upon, before soiling his hands with the clay. There was nothing near but pebbles. As he looked about, he came upon some mulberries. He picked some and gave them to the girl who stuffed her mouth with them to stop laughing...

Suddenly, something dreadful, overwhelming happened.

The girl found herself once more on the ground, as though someone had taken her by the shoulders and hurled her down. It had happened in a flash; her feeling of surprise was already gone.

"Mario!"

Mario did not answer. He also had fallen down, a few steps away, without knowing how it had happened. He rubbed his eyes, rolled his cigarette between his fingers and gave it a disgusted look. Was that a hair in it? He finally threw it away.

They looked about them: nothing.

The girl was terribly pale now.

"Mario!"

"What?"

"I think——"

"What do you think?"

"I think—that I'm pregnant already. I feel sick at my stomach."

"Silly!"

"But what is it, then? My head's whirling, horribly."

"Mine, too."

Was it their heads that were whirling?

"What if those mulberries were poison?"

"But I didn't eat any of them."

"A sunstroke, maybe?"

Mario shrugged his shoulders. Childish talk.

"What if it was——?"

"What now?"

"What if it was—love?"

The word held a new meaning. It seemed to him she ought to have been ashamed to speak it; that should have been understood.

The incident was quickly forgotten. It was time to go back to town, each one to his own home, as though they had been coming home from school as usual.

"Do you remember the way? I haven't got my wits about me," said Mario.

"I remember. We have to go back to that little red house that

we passed on the way down. It's a little more than two hundred yards from the tram."

They arose and set out, their arms around each other's waist.

"Are you sorry?"

The little girl's face was still that of a predatory monkey. She put the last mulberry in her mouth and gazed at her violet-stained hands, her mouth all the while that of a sibyl. She put them to her nose.

"Do you suppose they'll think it's ink?"

She was provokingly evasive. Even a little girl knows that she has nothing to lose by not answering.

The lad, in a grave tone, made another stupid remark:

"We'll have to get married."

She broke away from him and tossed her hat in the air.

"You or somebody else——"

She ran on, singing at the top of her voice. Her voice was horribly falsetto, and she was stupidly happy, as if she had never touched earth.

When they reached the road, they looked around to get their bearings. They could not see the little red cottage.

"It must be over this way. The town's down there."

They were at once convinced that they had gone too far, and set out again, hand in hand, toward their supposed destination. They gave frequent glances about them, for they were secretly worried. They could see a peasant cutting across the fields in the direction of a woman who was bent down over the earth. The man, both hands above his head, was gesticulating wildly and yelling like one possessed. The woman had raised up and was waiting for him, her hands upon her hips.

"Is he crazy?"

They would have liked to wait for the peasant to come up where they were, so that they could make out what he was saying. But a vague unrest propelled them onward. They could not keep, at last, from running. But why run?

As they reached the turn, they found the road littered with rubbish. They stood gazing at it. The lad's face was white.

"Lia!"

"What? What is it?"

"The red house——"

"The red house?"

"The red house—it was there!"

Then, he added:

"An earthquake——"

"Earthquake?"

"Yes——"

Huddled against each other, they fell back, as if the heaps of stone held a menace for them; and all the while they kept repeating: "An earthquake... earthquake..."

"But then——"

The girl did not finish. She seized him by the arm and started running, gesticulating like the peasant, with her hands above her head; they ran along the tram rails that led to the place where the town had been.

A number of brute-faced villagers were circumspectly exploring the ruins. Some of them had rifles slung over their shoulders. Others were digging, glancing to the right and left like grave-robbers.

"Get out of here!"

They were human beings. If they had barked or bellowed, the two urchins would not have been so astonished. But these were men who were speaking to them.

"Get out of here!"

They went on where chance led them, wandering about stupefiedly, not knowing where. Towards evening, fatigue brought them to the earth again, exhausted. Then, they began weeping. They wept for hours, like little children, until they lost all memory of what had happened.

The night cold made them shiver. Sombre and sullen, the lad, without saying anything, made her get up and follow him. There

was some linen that had been hung out to dry in the little garden-plot of one of the outlying houses of the suburb.

"Come along."

They went into the garden, took all the linen hanging on the line, and then went over to a very low and drooping tree which looked like an umbrella that had been opened and stuck down in the earth to drip. It resembled a baobab, but it was only a fig-tree.

The linen was stiff and shriveled. There was a large white counterpane and a number of pairs of long drawers with strings at the bottom; they were a man's drawers, and the man must have been an enormous one. His corpse, no doubt, was to be found under the débris of the house, mutilated and unrecognizable.

"Are you hungry?"

There were figs, big prematurely ripe figs, almost within hand's reach above them. In the false light, against the background of the sky, they had the appearance of pears. Lia was not hungry. She was afraid.

Mario also was afraid.

"Don't be afraid. I'm here."

He was glad that Lia was more afraid than he. That helped him to overcome his own fear.

He spread the drawers out on the grass, arranged the towels, stockings and handkerchiefs in the form of pillows, and unfolded the counterpane. They lay down and rolled up in the counterpane, which crackled about them and held them close together.

The fig-tree formed a grotto with a hollowed-out roof, through which they could glimpse shreds of sky. The air was filled with dull, dim, hostile sounds. The very plants in the garden seemed to have lost their innocent and familiar aspect, and now rose up like gigantic and aggressive ghosts.

It was impossible for them to keep their heads still upon the improvised pillow, and they were constantly stretching their necks in the attempt to do so. They were waiting for those shapeless shadows to take on the more precise outlines of a definite reality. The thought occurred to them that if this night had been just like all the others, they would have been even more afraid than they were.

They heard a couple of detonations, and two rifle shots, such as a hunter might have fired at a rabbit, and for some vague reason, they felt cheered by it. No one, certainly, could be hunting rabbits on a night like this. But at any rate, those shots showed that there were still living beings left in the world.

They were no longer cold. Little by little, they became gropingly conscious of each other's body. The afternoon on the slope of the hillock had been forgotten. He took her once more, as for the first time. They were like man and wife who, having wept all night long for the death of a child, found themselves a prey to the habits of the flesh.

They wept still, torturing their bodies in order that they might be brought the closer together in their weeping. Finally, without being conscious of it, they slept the sleep of the innocent.

——Translated from the Italian
by Samuel Putnam.

L. A. G. Strong, a native of Ireland, is one of the best-known newer short story writers, and a member of W. B. Yeates' new Irish Academy. "Good Riddance" as well as "Red Ball" (*Story* No. 10) will be included in his latest collection, which is to appear in America soon under the imprint of *Alfred A. Knopf* . . . Gordon Barrington is a young New Englander who has recently returned to the United States from a stay in Europe . . . Erskine Caldwell's latest novel, "God's Little Acre", is to be published in the Spring by the *Viking Press* . . . Alvah C. Bessie has previously appeared in *Story* and other publications. He lives on a farm in Vermont . . . Ira V. Morris is a resident of Paris . . . Noah Fabricant is a young Chicago physician who is as interested in writing as he is in doctoring and has contributed to the *New Republic* and the *American Mercury* . . . Kathleen Salisbury who wrote some years ago for the *S4N* is living and writing in the mountains and apple orchards of North Carolina . . . L. A. Pavey is an English writer of short stories who lives in London and has frequently contributed to the *Spectator, Manchester Guardian, English Review,* etc. . . .Pietro Solari, of the Italian "900" group, is the author of "La Coda del Diavolo, Racconto all' Antico," and the translation is by Samuel Putnam, editor of the "European Caravan," Volume Two of which is now in preparation.

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· ANNOUNCEMENT ·

WITH THIS issue, STORY comes to America. Its career, for a brief one, has been singularly eventful and will be of particular interest to those who are absorbed in watching the significant cross-currents of modern American letters. Its two editors, engaged in newspaper work in France, Middle Europe and the Balkans, founded it as an avocation some two years ago. They published it first in Vienna, later on the Island of Majorca.

They had no theories, and conceived of themselves as part of no literary movement. Their basic notion was that although the Short Story is a form clearly natural to our times, the best modern writers rarely turn to the form of their best work, because of the fancied commercial necessities of magazines of large circulation; thus, many fine conceptions that would naturally be cast in the short story form are not so written because the writers know from experience they would be unmarketable; and many, though written, for the same reason never see print. Also, they felt that the work of new and young writers was often vitiated by this same commercial preoccupation; that they write more or less to a formula, not what they themselves think the public will appreciate, but what they think editors think the public will appreciate; and thus inspiration is muddied at its source.

With the very first issue of STORY, the truth of this notion was pretty well demonstrated. Out of this first issue, Edward J. O'Brien, who chanced upon a copy of the magazine, wrote for permission to print four of the stories in his anthology, *The Best Short Stories of 1931*. This was a larger number of stories than Mr. O'Brien had chosen from any other magazine in seventeen years of anthology-making. An even more enviable record was established by STORY in 1932 when Mr. O'Brien chose

eight stories for reprinting. In the preface to *The Best Short Stories of 1932*, Mr. O'Brien declared, "STORY is now the most distinguished short story magazine in the world."

Similarly, in other quarters, the magazine acquired an uncommon standing. Most of its writers who were new found themselves approached at once by magazine editors for other work, and many of them received requests from book publishers for novels. In short, STORY achieved a really remarkable international reputation—but only among the literati; for in spite of the wide interest on two continents that seemed to follow its every issue, at no time, amusingly, did its circulation ever exceed six hundred copies.

The editors of STORY now bring the publication to America for a simple reason: because, while they feel they have clearly demonstrated the artistic validity of their basic idea, they realize the magazine must also have an economic validity. In a word, it must have faithful readers as well as writers. They believe sincerely that there must be a sufficient number of persons in this country interested in the untrammeled development of American letters and in writing that will not compromise with commercial considerations, to make a venture like this modestly self-sustaining. They honestly seek no more. They have no wild ambitions for STORY; they have no illusions that it will suddenly produce a new crop of Conrads or Chekhovs. But they believe deeply that it may easily open the pathway to one or two such, and that it is of infinite importance that a pathway be kept open. Little known as the magazine has been, they have already seen that the stories submitted to them—for honor, apparently, and little more—are more original and in general far superior to the run of those which editors of magazines of large circulation, with fixed notions about their readers, apparently seem to feel they should accept.

So, they ask the support of those who feel in sympathy, whether as readers or writers, with such an enterprise. If you enjoy STORY, if you think its purpose, even though it may turn out to be but partially achieved, is a worthy one, will you not assist it by yourself subscribing, and also by calling it to the attention of any of your friends who would be especially interested in an effort of this kind?